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COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE

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"Oh, I love this dear world!" she cried; "I love to be alive and young."
BOOK FOURTH, CHAP. IV.

COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE

A NOVEL

1165

BY

LUCAS MALET

AUTHOR OF

"MRS. LORIMER, A SKETCH IN BLACK AND WHITE"

89975 m

"Lequel de nous n'a sa terre promise, son jour d'extase, et sa fin dans l'exil?"—AMIEL

[redacted]

NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION

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COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE.

BOOK FIRST.

FATHER AND SON.

CHAPTER I.

"LE ROI EST MORT."

THE house at Bassett Darcy lies low. From around it the well-timbered park rises on three sides, in gentle undulations, towards the stretch of high table-land forming the south-eastern corner of the county. On the fourth side, broad lawns slope down to the banks of the Tull—a quiet, uneventful stream, that wanders indolently through mile after mile of rich meadow land, past osier beds and alders, and long lines of pollarded willows; under the wide arches of old brown sandstone bridges; by villages of quaint half-timbered houses, and spinneys, where the rooks congregate and nightingales sing in the early summer; and by waste places—pleasant spots in which Nature has her own way still, and refuses to be put in harness and to labour for the general good of mankind in any more direct manner than by an offering of sweet scents and colours—places overgrown with meadow-sweet, and yellow flags, and pink willow-herb, and tall spikes of purple loosestrife, and docks, and nodding grasses—by these the river wanders to mingle its current at last—some few miles west of the bright little modern watering-place of Tullingworth—with that of the historic Avon, and so find its way to the Severn, and the far distant unknown sea.

The Tull is anything but dramatic. It indulges in no sparkling races over rounded boulders, no splashings into deep pools, no roar and rush, no petulance or bubbling laughter. The steady

monotonous repose of the Midlands lies upon it. Like the men and women who live in the green pastoral country beside its banks, it is moderate, neutral-tinted, slow, self-absorbed, and silent. At first sight it appears to be somewhat wanting in individual character. Yet this quiet midland stream is capable of yielding very pretty effects of light and shade, of form and colour to those who will take the trouble to look for them. And undoubtedly its neighbourhood lends a singular charm to the grounds at Bassett Darcy.

Just below the garden front of the stately Jacobean mansion it makes a sharp curve away to the right, round a thickly wooded spit of land; and, thanks to an artificial widening of the river bed, presents to the eye quite an imposing expanse of smooth shimmering water.

The house itself shares in great measure the restrained and unemotional aspect of the river. It is a large square building of the yellow-brown sandstone of the country; with rectangular windows and doorways, and a low-pitched slated roof, but just visible over the line of the parapet. This style of architecture is singularly innocent of surprises; it is full of solidity and sobriety, and is altogether too dignified to pander to a frivolous taste for the superficially picturesque. The only incident in the serious *façade* at all claiming attention is the great double flight of stone steps leading up to the hall door. These steps are pleasant to contemplate. There is a generousness about the descending curve of the massive balustrade, and an air of easy hospitality about the broad stairway that proves decidedly encouraging to the guest arriving at Bassett Darcy.

Here the Enderbys have lived for many generations—a strong vigorous race, with but little tendency to dwindle down to an unsatisfactory point in the person of one female representative. There is a certain virility, a healthy coarseness of fibre about most of them, which promises to the fat family acres—even in these thin, eager, somewhat over-civilized times—a long continuance in the possession of heirs male. A mellow canvas in a carved and gilded frame, hanging in the dining-room at Bassett, sets forth in its most agreeable and impressive aspect the true Enderby type. It represents a large fresh-complexioned gentleman in a curled wig, with a round solid head, short nose—wide across the nostrils and slightly inclining to aquiline—a long, full upper lip, pouting mouth, large lower jaw, with plenty of what—for the want of a better word—one must needs call jowl, and prominent light-brown eyes under slightly arched eyebrows. His neck is thick, and is encircled by a voluminous neckcloth of the finest

India muslin. The glint of a steel cuirass shows under his scarlet coat bountifully adorned with gold lace. The picture is by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and, doubtless, "Philip Enderby, Esq., Major-General of His Majesty's Forces, Colonel of the 204th Regiment of Foot, and Governor of Fort George, in North Britain"—as an inscription runs under a print from the original picture—fared very well at the hands of that most courteous and genial of portrait-painters. You cannot avoid a suspicion that a few too powerful lines have been gently obliterated; that the gallant general's eyes were not quite so clear, and that his complexion was a few shades deeper in tone. You feel pretty sure that he must have been a man of strong animal passions; straightforward and honest in character, but also not a little obstinate, arrogant, and tyrannical. A person rather inordinately sensible of his own importance in the universal order of things; kind-hearted, yet disposed to bully and bluster, and eminently unfitted to appreciate the best of jokes, if made at his own expense.

Most of the Enderby men have adhered pretty closely to the above type; and, perhaps consequently, have not created for themselves a very definite place in history. The eldest son of the house has usually gone into the army; but with the exception of General Philip, whose portrait hangs in the dining-room, the Enderbys, until the present generation, have not contributed any conspicuously distinguished soldiers to the service of their country. Perhaps Bassett Darcy is somewhat to blame in this matter, and has helped to check the full development of the family genius. Advanced thinkers tell us that the possession of a perfectly secure social position and the prospect of a comfortable inheritance are apt to paralyze ambition, and strangle those finer emotions which inspire a man to forge his way upward in the world. No doubt it is "no mean happiness to be seated in the mean;" but it is a species of happiness liable, they say, to be cherished somewhat to the exclusion of distinct progress and high endeavour.

It may be broadly stated, then, that most of the Enderbys have lived uneventful lives enough; have mixed freely in the best local society, have married young, ridden hard to hounds, quarrelled hotly over county politics, consumed a very fair portion of first-rate wine; have been reckoned considerably important—an opinion they were disposed to share in sincerely themselves—within a radius of some twenty or thirty miles; and when, after a long and usually respectable, if not brilliant, career, Death has called for them, they have prepared—perhaps a trifle unwillingly—to obey his summons, and ascend to some not too spiritually minded or ecstatic quarter of the New Jerusalem.

Occasionally, however, even in the most physically and mentally conservative of races there occurs a sudden deflection from the accustomed type. It is probably only a case of reversion, of a return to an older strain of blood. Be that as it may, the individual exhibiting these unusual qualities and tendencies appears to have a dash of original genius. He is tempted to emerge, to take a new departure, and, consequently, runs the risk of becoming confusing, if not downright objectionable, in the eyes of his near relations.

It is a case of the kind which forms the basis of this unpretentious chronicle. Scientifically considered, this is the history of a deviation—of a doubtfully successful exception to a safe, though unexciting, general rule.

One evening, towards the close of October, 1876, a peculiar stillness seemed to reign at Bassett Darcy. It was a stillness of expectation rather than of repose; and Dr. Mortimer Symes, sitting in the wide window-seat of the big blue bedroom over the hall, was curiously sensible of the silent pause which penetrated the atmosphere of the large house, and appeared even to spread itself over the face of the serious landscape outside. The rolling pasture land of the park showed a dull green, with a sandy bloom upon it here and there from the stalks of the withered spare-grass. In the distance long beds of pale mist lay across it, out of which rose the trees and scattered clumps of hawthorn bushes. It was too dark clearly to see the colour of these latter; but you might perceive a warm russet tinge over their dark foliage. Along the top of the hill, just outside the park wall and about half a mile distant, the trees and cottages in Priors Bassett village rose in a dense mass against the sky, the twisted chimneys and gable-ends showing sharp and black against the light behind them. The sky itself, a pale opaque blue, shading into a bank of dove-coloured earth-mist below, was covered to the westward beyond the village, where the bare upland met the sky-line, with a fine network of delicate crimson and flame-coloured cloud.

Dr. Symes was given to observation in many departments besides the strictly professional one. He was fond of perceiving analogies and correspondences between natural and spiritual phenomena. He had also cultivated a power of double consciousness; and though acutely aware of every sound that came from the great blue-curtained bedstead, where lay old Mr. Matthew Enderby—his strong vigorous life slowly ebbing, sinking, failing, like the failing day—the doctor was also quite sufficiently unabsorbed to note both the quiet of the house and the effects of the waning sunset outside. He wished, if possible, to drive back to

Tullingworth that night; but he had half-promised Mr. Jack Enderby to stay to the end. He did not think the end was very far off now; and, meanwhile, he felt quite at liberty to entertain himself with a calm, if sympathetic, observation of his surroundings.

Poor Jack Enderby, on the other hand, sitting at the farther side of the bed, and watching in the growing dimness, was anything but calm. He found himself in the unfortunate position of a man who has a disagreeable message to deliver, and who dreads almost equally the opportunity and the absence of an opportunity for delivering it.

Jack was really an excellent fellow, and, notwithstanding a short, reddish-yellow beard and a white tie, realized very completely the true Enderby type. He had plenty of pluck—of nothing tangible or material was he for an instant afraid; but not even the influences of his sacred profession had supplied his original lack of moral courage. He went in mortal fear of what is best described as a scene or a situation. There was nothing gloomy, sacerdotal, prophetic, or denunciatory about him; and, unless he happened to be personally offended—like most persons of his complexion, he was a trifle hot-tempered—few things were less congenial to him than admonishing backsliders, pointing sternly to the path of duty, and foretelling the plagues justly following on all wilful hardening of the heart. I am afraid it must be admitted that Mr. Jack Enderby had not any special vocation for the priesthood, and that the exercise, during a period of some twenty years, of his spiritual calling had not made him different, in any sensible degree, to the ordinary run of English provincial gentlemen.

At last there was a movement on the part of old Matthew Enderby. He shifted his position slightly, and began speaking in a thick unmodulated voice. There was an evident struggle and difficulty about his articulation, and at first the words spoken were barely intelligible.

Jack moved uneasily in his chair, and cleared his throat with a touch of nervousness. He glanced inquiringly up at Mortimer Symes as he did so; but the doctor sat quite still, his high conical head, hooked nose, long shaven upper lip and straight chin, with its straggling and grizzled imperial, silhouetted against the light background of the window. Jack, looking up at him suddenly, was forcibly struck by the eminent medical man's resemblance to a goat; and then felt a little ashamed of himself for having ventured to think of anything at all amusing under existing circumstances.

"The scent's cold," murmured old Matthew Enderby, huskily, "cold—cold. It's no use trying any more. Better give up and get away home. Don't you see, it's getting dark?"

Jack held aside the blue stuff curtain of the great old-fashioned four-post bed, and leant forward.

"Can you hear me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, I can hear you well enough, Jack," answered the old man, in the same thick, monotonous voice. "Pity they made a parson of you, Jack; but you'll have it all your own way soon, parson or not. None of 'em can prevent that. You're a regular Enderby, Jack—eyes and jaw and all. But the scent's cold," he went on, "and it's getting dark and late."

Mr. Jack Enderby was one of those easy-going, kindly natured, unimaginative men who are never quite prepared for the deeper and sadder experiences of life. They never get over a sensation of surprise at the neighbourhood of sickness and death. Their own superabundant vitality makes these two things appear so extremely improbable to them. Jack did not certainly love his father with any very exuberant affection; but, as he put it himself, he "felt awfully cut up at seeing the old gentleman lying there," and this state of feeling made it all the more difficult to deliver messages which he was pretty well convinced would prove highly unacceptable.

"Never mind about me, sir," he said, with a certain effort, and speaking as distinctly as he could. "I don't want you to think about me just now, but about my brother."

He paused, hoping that the words might awaken a train of sleeping memories, and thereby make what had still to be said easier in the saying of it. But Matthew Enderby's intelligence—never a very active one—was clouded with the mists of weakness and approaching death. His thoughts, as so often happens just at the close, wandered back to the days of youth and early manhood.

"Brother," he asked slowly, "which brother? There was poor Darcy, he was drowned at sea; and there was Godfrey—fighting Enderby, they used to call him—never saw a better man with the gloves in my life. He fought a bargee down in Barnwell one Saturday night, and sewed him up so that he couldn't move for a month. Bless me! he was a fine fellow; but your mother never liked him, somehow. He hasn't been here this long while. Is he dead too, Jack?" he added suddenly in a sharper tone.

"I didn't want to speak to you about poor Uncle Godfrey, sir," Jack Enderby answered — "not about your brother, but——"

"Ah! he's gone, I remember," interrupted the old man, speaking faster and more clearly. "They're all gone—my brothers and my old friends. God help 'em! you don't see such men nowadays. And Matt's gone. And your mother's gone too, Jack. Ah, dear me!"

The tears came in Jack's eyes, and ran down over his fresh-coloured cheeks. All this was horribly painful to him. He would have liked to say something gentle and comforting to Mr. Enderby at that moment; but a feeling of diffidence, perhaps of false shame, held him back. His relations with his father had always been of a rather rough-and-ready sort. "I wish to goodness Augusta was here," he thought. "Women are so much better at saying appropriate things than we are."

Matthew Enderby stretched his right arm out stiffly, and felt down over the bed-clothes for the head of an old wire-haired terrier, that lay sleeping, rather uneasily, on the bed beside him.

"They're all gone," he repeated, slowly and sadly. Then he fondled the old dog's head with feeble, uncertain fingers.

Dr. Symes got up from his place in the window. He was a short thick-made man, and limped a good deal in walking. He came across to the bedside, and stood there for a moment, looking narrowly at Matthew Enderby, who lay with his eyes half shut.

"I do not wish to distress you unnecessarily, my dear Mr. Enderby," he said in a low voice, glancing across at Jack, "but I fear the time granted you for speaking—pardon my alluding to private matters—is likely to be limited. I cannot counsel delay." And with that he retired to his seat in the window again.

Jack bent over the bed. As the saying is, he took his courage in both hands.

"Father," he said, "you remember my brother?—you remember Philip?"

Matthew Enderby opened his eyes, and turned his head sharply on the pillows.

"And what about Philip?" he asked curtly, almost angrily.

"He's here, sir. He's downstairs. He came early this morning; but you've been sleeping a good deal, and we couldn't tell you sooner. He wants to see you. Won't you see him, sir, just for five minutes—just once before——"

Jack stopped abruptly. His words had produced an effect he had not looked for.

Old Matthew Enderby, filled with sudden strength, sat bolt upright in bed, his face firm, high-coloured, passionate as it had never been in the fulness of his manly vigour.

"I sent your brother Philip out of this house three-and-

twenty years ago, and dared him ever to come back to it!" he cried in a loud, vibrating voice. "He broke your mother's heart. By her deathbed I swore I would never forgive him; and I will never forgive him, never!"

Jack was shocked, pained, altogether amazed. He stood up.

"Upon my word, sir——" he began.

But a rapid change came over Matthew Enderby. He stretched out both arms with a sudden convulsive gesture, as though he was pushing away from him an actual and visible presence.

"Ah!" he cried hoarsely. "Good God! what—what's this?"

Then he fell back heavily against the pillows. The old terrier awoke with a start, and uttering a low whimpering howl, its hair bristling, and its tail between its legs, crouched shivering up against the high footboard of the bedstead.

Dr. Symes came from the window again. He bent down over his patient, and laid his hand on his wrist for a few seconds in silence.

"The end has come even sooner than I had anticipated, Mr. Enderby," he said at last, looking up at Jack, who stood waiting.

The doctor turned his head and glanced at the dog cowering down at the foot of the bed.

"Singular," he said, half aloud, and with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, "very singular indeed."

Meanwhile, Philip Enderby, the subject of the foregoing conversation, waited, with what patience he could muster, downstairs, hoping for a summons to his father's bedside. It was melancholy work enough, pacing up and down the gloomy panelled saloon, with its tall rectangular windows, and dark old-fashioned furniture, in the dim twilight. The room had that indescribable odour and chill about it which is wont to haunt rarely used chambers. The outlook from the window was certainly ill-calculated to dispel the depressing influences that reigned within. The white fog hung low and dense over the river, and crept up the sloping lawns towards the house. A black mass of trees—oaks and beeches—rose out of it just by the bend of the stream on the left; and beyond the long flat stretch of the park faded away into misty uncertainty under the growing darkness.

After many years of absence this was hardly a cheerful home-coming for Colonel Enderby. The place seemed full of ghosts, and ghosts are rarely good company. The Colonel had come back longing for peace, hoping for a final reconciliation which might wipe out bitter memories of the past; but as one half-hour

after another slipped by without sound or movement in the large house, and as the evening deepened towards the night, his hopes died slowly and sadly away, and deep disappointment and regret possessed him.

For Philip, though he had knocked about the world more than most men, and was by no means a weak or over-sentimental person, had a great singleness of purpose, and the keenness of feeling which almost invariably goes with singleness of purpose. His experience of life had been of a somewhat stern and practical nature, making demands upon the more sturdy masculine virtues, and giving but small opportunity for delicate self-analysis or self-culture. Yet there was a very genuine vein of poetry in him too—a clinging in thought to this same old home, a deep desire for re-union with his father and his family, a great capacity for enjoyment of the gentler, quieter, more domestic sides of life. Perhaps the Colonel's reverence for natural, simple, homely joys had only been deepened by a certain denial and thwarting of desire that had befallen him. His emotions were none the less vivid because, so far, they had been voiceless and unsatisfied, kept in check by the hand of unpropitious circumstance.

He had, among other tendencies which people will praise or blame according to their own taste in such matters, an almost quixotic indifference to his own material advantage. Hearing of old Mr. Enderby's serious illness, he came to Bassett, not impelled by any desire to secure a possibly forfeited inheritance, but with the simple purpose of entreating for pardon and for a renewal of affection, before death should have made all such renewal impossible. Good-natured Jack Enderby, with his handsome wife and herd of noisy children, might move over from the ramshackle rectory house at Cold Enderby, and reign at Bassett in peace and plenty, and Philip would bear them no grudge in the future. All he begged for was an assurance that he was no longer an outcast, unforgiven, perhaps even forgotten, without place or part in his father's memory. But as time drew on, while the Colonel paced to and fro, stern and silent, in the cold, dusky saloon downstairs, he knew that all hope of reconciliation grew fainter and fainter. He felt sick at heart.

At last there was a sound of footsteps crossing the hall, and of two men talking just outside. Colonel Enderby drew himself up rather stiffly, and stood waiting in the middle of the room.

Dr. Symes entered first, composed and professional, limping slightly, and making a little stumping noise with his gold-headed walking-stick.

"If I might order my carriage immediately, my dear Mr. Enderby, I should be extremely glad," he said, turning to Jack, who followed him into the room. "If you will kindly permit me I will ring at once," he added, moving across as he spoke to the fireplace.

The two other men were left standing opposite to each other. Colonel Enderby looked hard at his younger brother; but it was too dark for him to make out the expression of his face.

"Well?" he asked, rather hoarsely.

"My dear fellow, it's all over," answered Jack, in a broken voice.

The Colonel bowed his head. There was a silence for some minutes. Then Jack Enderby did an extremely unromantic thing. The long watching, and the final scene upstairs had upset him considerably, and his taste at no time was over-refined. He was conscious, too, that his troubles in the way of delivering disagreeable messages was by no means yet over. He poured himself out a couple of glasses of sherry, from a decanter that stood on one of the bare tables, and gulped them down hastily one after the other. His hand shook a good deal; he felt all to pieces, so to speak.

Dr. Symes glanced at him and then at the Colonel, who waited, erect and silent. Notwithstanding certain superficial affectations and vanities, Mortimer Symes was an eminently kind-hearted man. He was also, as has already been stated, a pretty shrewd observer and something of a diplomatist. He never could see the object of telling people truths of an unpalatable description unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. Just now he perceived that Jack Enderby was screwing up his courage with a view to blurting out information calculated to give acute pain to the living, and reflect no small discredit upon the dead. He decided to intervene.

"The end was extremely sudden, Colonel Enderby," he said, folding his arms, and speaking with that fulness of utterance which argues distinct satisfaction on the part of the speaker at the sound of his own voice. "A long period of coma, followed by a brief interval of consciousness—the mind even then considerably clouded. An inclination to dwell on the past,—reminiscences of former friendships and interests, an awaking of early impressions, but no active appreciation of immediate surroundings. A momentary flash of the old remarkable vigour, and then," added Dr. Symes, extending his hand with a slow downward movement, "a final quenching of the light. Your brother naturally was greatly affected. Even a man like myself, whose

professional duties so often bring scenes of this nature before him, could hardly remain entirely unmoved. I need not enlarge on the subject to you, Colonel Enderby, who must so frequently have witnessed death in its most distressing forms, the horror of it aggravated by hideous and repulsive surroundings. Familiarity fails to rob death of its terrors. But I own I am greatly relieved," he continued, with a relapse into an easier conversational manner —"sincerely relieved. With your father's remarkably strong constitution, I had feared a painful struggle at the last. I am thankful to say we were spared anything of that kind."

The Colonel bowed a sort of general assent to the worthy doctor's statements. It would be indelicate, he felt, to ask for intimate explanations before a third person. His native reticence, and an innate dignity which belonged to him, put all further inquiries out of the question.

Jack, meanwhile, was not slow to perceive the way of escape which Dr. Symes' discourse had opened to him. He stifled any conscientious scruples that assailed him.

"I did what I could, Philip," he said, in a slightly apologetic tone. "But it was just as Dr. Symes says. My father wasn't quite himself, you know. He was wandering a good deal, and one couldn't make him understand anything out of the common run."

"No, no; of course not," replied Colonel Enderby.

He spoke as thoroughly accepting the position, and even setting the matter aside; but there was a sharp bitterness at his heart. He was repulsed. His last chance was gone. Philip was not without a measure of pride. He turned away, walked across to the window, and stood looking out into the misty twilight, while the doctor indulged in a series of appropriate and somewhat wordy reflections, to which Jack answered with incoherent monosyllables.—His father was dead, and in dying had given no sign, He himself was unpardoned. The injustice of the thing, as well as the sorrow of it, cried out in Philip Enderby. He could not bring himself to remain in a house where his coming had been so unwelcome. He turned away from the window, went up and spoke to his brother.

"I must get back to Aldershot to-night," he said quietly. "I suppose I can catch the night mail at Slowby. I'll come down for the funeral, of course, if you'll let me know the day and hour."

"Oh! but you know, my dear fellow——" began Jack Enderby.

The Colonel interrupted him.

"All right," he said. "I know you're very kind, Jack; but, under the circumstances, I had better go all the same, thanks."

CHAPTER II.

"VIVE LE ROI!"

ON the morning after his father's funeral Philip Enderby was up and out early. He had passed a night in his old home for the first time for over twenty years, and sleep had been difficult of attainment. There was very much to think about; much that was painful; difficult to forgive; to submit to patiently. A sense of unjust wrong is not an agreeable bedfellow. The Colonel was glad enough when the light of a stormy dawn began to glimmer in through his window shutters; he would get up and go out, and try to find good counsel out of doors.

He went downstairs and out on to the dead of the steps in front of the door. The old wire-haired terrier got up from his place on the tiger-skin before the hearth in the hall, and trotted out after him. The dog seemed anxious for notice; he put his forepaws up against the balustrade and forced his grey muzzle up into Colonel Enderby's hand with a certain air of inquiry. The old master was gone; was this the new one? The Colonel looked down and patted the dog's head for a minute; then he drew himself up and took a deep breath of the keen moist air. His heart was very full just then.

"I am afraid I am a bit of a fool," he said, half ashamed of his own emotion. "I suppose I didn't know how much I cared for the place till it came to a question of giving it up altogether. It cuts one a little at first."

The gaudy beauty of a wild autumn morning was upon Bassett Darcy. The sky was clear after a night of rain and wind; a thin, watery blue above, and below almost white, with a flare of yellow light along the eastern horizon. A broken procession of light grey clouds—called of country weather-prophets by the ominous name of "messengers"—streamed up from the westward and straggled, ragged and dirty, across a bank of darker cloud stretching behind the uplands of Priors Bassett. The trees, roughly stripped of their coloured leaves by the night's storm, were black with wet and glistened in the sunshine, the coarse grass of the open park looking a raw green. The wind, chill with rain, blew the rooks and jackdaws hither and thither, as they left the wood overhanging the bend of the sluggish river down behind the house. Somewhere among the shrubbery, under shelter of the high red-brick wall of the gardens on the left, a robin was

singing a tender lament for the dead summer and for the pain and cold of the long bleak coming winter.

There were sounds, too, from the large block of stable buildings on the right. The murmer of voices, the impatient stamp of a horse, the rattling of pails and tinkle of falling water, and now and again a few bars of some tune, whistled shrilly, came to Colonel Enderby's ears, as he stood there looking silently at the strange yet familiar scene. Memories of his mother, of his childhood, of quaint games and imaginings, when the wood by the river was shrouded in delightful mystery, and the river itself seemed full of unknown danger and of promise; when the flower-garden was a sweet enchanted region, and when every natural object possessed a spirit and personality of its own, to be approached with wonder and reverence; when gardeners and grooms too seemed wise with all manner of occult wisdom, men who had a tight grip on fundamental facts, and were not to be deluded by mere appearances; when the keeper, in his gaiters and brown velveteen coat, with pockets big enough to hold a couple of retriever puppies, appeared a wild and daring character, fascinating, yet somewhat alarming also, thanks to his careless disregard of animal life and profound experience in the matter of vermin.—Memories such as these, impressions and associations which had slumbered for years, awoke now in Colonel Enderby. Yes, it is all there, all that has ever befallen us, written with some mysterious kind of sympathetic ink upon the heart and conscience, and needing merely the fated touch which shall restore to the invisible characters their original legibility, and make us live our past lives over once more in pleasure or in pain.

He went down the stone steps, round the end of the great square house, and along the wide gravel terrace with the shrubberies on one hand and the sloping lawns on the other. He had wandered there years ago, on sleepy summer evenings, with his gentle, sweet-faced mother, telling her in shy, half-awkward fashion the story of his first love and of Miss Cecilia Murray's many perfections, while Mr. Enderby sat over his wine in the large dining-room indoors, and the last glow of the sunset faded behind the distant woods.

In that pool yonder, under the alder stump, he caught a two-pound perch in the Easter holidays, the year he went to Harrow; and there was the place, just where the bank shelves into the water among the rushes and broad dock-leaves, now sere and withered with the chill of autumn, that he and Matt had seen a couple of water-rats, one Sunday, after afternoon service, and that Spot, the old water spaniel, had missed the last one by a couple

of inches. And there:—but the tale would be endless. Each path and bush and flower-bed had its history, simple, yet vivid, sad or merry of remembrance.

And since those far-off yet unforgotten times, the little, ugly, red-legged, blue-eyed boy had grown into a man; had wandered far and wide, had seen strange sights, and passed through strange experiences; his gentle mother had lain these many years sleeping in the churchyard on the hill above; his first love, the fair Cecilia, had married the not too reputable son of an Irish peer, and had drifted away along some quite other road across the land of this life; the old Squire, obstinate and tyrannical to the last, was dead. Philip Enderby himself was middle-aged. He supposed that he had outlived most of his hopes and illusions; and yet the old home was just the same as ever. The rooks still clamoured as they left their nests, and the fish rose in the lazy stream; robins sang plaintively among the shrubs, men whistled over their work in the stable yard, and the rich, damp, clay soil smelt strong and fresh under the morning sunshine. The individual changes, drops away, and dies, his place knows him no more. Yet nature can always find another bird to sing the old song, and the wind blows as it will through all the long years, and the land wakes glad and fragrant at the kiss of the pale dawn, and plain daily labour goes on steadily, unheedingly, from generation to generation. Birds will sing, stable buckets clatter, and grooms whistle, so one fancies at times, just as usual on the morning of the Last Day itself.

Colonel Enderby, with the old white terrier trotting solemnly at his heels, paced slowly up and down the long walk, thinking of these things. One of the under-gardeners sweeping fallen leaves and twigs off the smooth gravel, stopped his work as he passed by, and took a good long stare at the Colonel. "He'd heered," as he told his wife that evening over his supper, "a'ready, as Mr. Jack Enderby was come into it all; but he felt he'd like to know what sort of a looking gentleman the other one was, considering the old Squire was so terrible spiteful agin' him."

Perhaps we may as well take a good look at Philip Enderby, too, as he moves along under the garden front of the stately house in the wind and the morning sunshine, and see what manner of man he is—outwardly, at all events. I am afraid it must be owned frankly, at starting, that he is not at all an obviously romantic figure. The Colonel is turned eight-and-forty, and is not unprosperous looking—facts calculated, in the estimation of most persons, to knock all prospects of romance effectually on the head! Further, it must be owned that at no period of his

life has he been reckoned a handsome man. All the same, there is a certain air of distinction about him. He is rather over middle height; well made and well set-up—broad across the chest and small round the loins; and possessing, too, even in the undress of a rough shooting-coat and heavy boots, that effect of spotless freshness and cleanliness that is one of the most notable characteristics of a well-bred Englishman. His features are somewhat large and strongly marked; the nose aquiline, the mouth hidden under a heavy light-brown moustache, the ends of which the Colonel has a habit of pulling downwards in meditative fashion whenever he has anything a little on his mind. His jaw is square and solid; his complexion originally fair, but now tanned and dulled by travel and exposure. His crisp short hair, a darker brown by some two shades than his moustache, is as thick as ever, and still untouched with grey—a fact which, though he is far from being vain, does certainly yield him considerable satisfaction.

Philip Enderby's eyes are the only point in his personal appearance meriting unqualified praise. They are deep-set under straight eyebrows—real fighting eyes of bright blue; the pupil small, the iris large and peculiarly rich and clear in colour. Such eyes are habitually kind and friendly enough; but they can grow very keen and ruthless when the blood is hot and an ugly day's work has to be done. And our friend here has seen an ugly day's work done more than once in his life. He has seen more than most men's share of battle and horror and death. He looked at them steadily, not without quick movements of pitying wonder and disgust; but chiefly with a stern sense of his own immediate duty, which was to put through the work in hand simply, and even cheerfully, without any careful hesitation or speculation concerning the ultimate ethics of the situation.—This last sentence seems to imply something of harshness and cruelty, I fear; but it may be questioned whether any man will be of much active use in the world who has not a residuum of brutality left in him. In any case, it is certain that in some natures, along with a dash of harshness and cruelty—if one must needs employ such unlovely terms—goes tenderness of heart towards the weak and unfortunate, delicate consideration for friend or kinsman, and a devotion towards chosen individuals so profound and constant that it is almost perilous in its intensity.

The man of this temper who loves—still more, who loves late—will do it with a terrible completeness. Strength has its dangers as well as weakness. They are touched with dignity and splendour, it is true; but they are too often touched as well with

a species of desperation. These simple whole-hearted natures, under the dominion of a fixed idea, are horribly difficult to cope with. Nothing turns them aside. They will go through fire and water, utterly regardless of the well-intentioned remonstrances of the bystanders, to reach the goal, whatever it may be.

In saying this, I do not mean for an instant to suggest that this quiet, dignified, and, alas! middle-aged soldier, Colonel Enderby, was at all disposed just now to run mad upon love or any other matter. The potential possibilities of a character may never be developed in a given direction; but, thanks to circumstances, may remain latent to the end. Far from indulging in exaggeration of feeling or intention, he was calmly making up his mind to accept the inevitable; to part with a hope that, though but half-formulated, had been very dear to him; to retire gracefully from a difficult position; and not only conceal, but, if possible, even forget his own disappointment and injury.

For the Colonel paced up and down that bright morning in front of the house at Bassett Darcy, not as master, but as guest. Old Mr. Enderby had bequeathed all his property—houses, lands, plate, and other possessions—to the younger of his two surviving sons. Philip only inherited that which would have come to him had his elder brother, Matthew, lived—two-thirds of his mother's fortune and a sum of money left, in remainder, to him by name, in his grandfather's will. He would no longer be a poor man, it is true; but to some persons, even the assurance that in future they are secure of a comfortable balance at their bankers' will not wholly compensate for the subjective discomfort of knowing themselves to be the objects of an undying grudge. This public and practical repudiation on the part of his father was hard to bear. His pride rebelled against it, as well as his heart; and it was not without a struggle that the Colonel schooled himself into acquiescence.

As he stood still in the middle of the broad walk, looking away over the river to the wood and the levels of the grass park beyond, something very like tears came into his eyes. There was a depth of very wholesome humanity in the man. It would have been pleasant to him to settle down here, with a wife and children —as Jack was about to do, for instance—to see another generation growing up about him, full of hope and generous ambition; to move on, surrounded by kindly, faithful faces and honest love, towards the inevitable, but undreaded close. He could not help feeling, rather sadly, that he had missed a good deal in life. It was dreary work looking at all this established security and order from the point of view of a homeless old bachelor. Colonel

Enderby shook himself, with a queer smile, and turned back to the house again.

"Ah! well, it's no good quarrelling with facts," he said, half aloud. "We all get what we're best fitted for in the long run, I suppose; and it doesn't pay to cry over spilt milk. Come along, Vic"—to the terrier, who sat on the gravel, still contemplating him with an air of inquiry—"I'm going indoors, like a sensible fellow, to my breakfast."

Mr. Jack Enderby, meanwhile, notwithstanding that at this moment Fortune appeared to woo him with her broadest smiles, was in an unhappy frame of mind. Not that he was troubled with importunate memories, or perplexed by the indifference of universal nature to the fate of the individual or any such high or intimate matter. Jack was safely rooted in the conventional and commonplace, and his perturbations were of a purely concrete order. But he was entirely unaccustomed to feeling more than one thing at a time, and just now he was a prey to many conflicting sensations. He found it dreadfully confusing. Jack's conscience did not accuse him. He knew that he had brought no undue influence to bear on his father regarding the disposition of the property; yet still he was painfully aware of embarrassment and discomfort in his elder brother's presence. Not possessing any morbid or ascetic views concerning the inherent value of suffering, it seemed to him a little too bad that he should be so extremely uncomfortable when he was quite innocent of wrong-doing.

He had come to the conclusion the day before that it was incumbent upon him to make Colonel Enderby a handsome and appropriate speech on the subject of the property. But the house had been full of people; there had been a good deal of movement and stir, and, after the funeral, a tendency in the direction of wine and cold baked meats, and general conversation in a rising scale of cheerfulness. Mr. Peter Gamage, the lawyer from Slowby, had stayed to dinner. So had Dr. Symes—not that the latter gentleman had any intention of being bracketed socially with a country solicitor. He stayed for reasons of his own. He happened to have heard some dramatic stories of those terrible years of the Indian Mutiny, and he was anxious to make nearer acquaintance with a man who had been a not undistinguished actor in them. Dr. Symes had remained, talking to the Colonel, till late. There had really been no favourable opening for Jack Enderby's speech; and as he was not by any means glib, unless he lost his temper, and as he stood in mortal fear of fine talking and heroics, he had not tried very hard to find an opening, since none presented itself unsought.

Now this morning the prospect of that same speech hung over him like a dark and dreadful shadow, while at the same time he was conscious of an elation so lively that it made him wash, put on his boots, and even tie his white tie—Mr. Enderby had an instinct that it would be graceful to emphasize the outward and visible signs of his clerical profession at this juncture—in time to a dashing triumphal march which kept on thumping itself out in his brain.

"Matt can go to Eton," he thought, "and the girls can have new frocks whenever they want them. Bates says there's no end of first-rate wine in the cellars; and Augusta will look uncommonly well in those diamonds of my poor dear mother's."

Then he checked himself; grew suddenly serious, thought of Jacob and the birthright, and of the nasty consequences in some ways of his misappropriation of Esau's blessing; and then of the virtues of the law of entail, and of the sacred institution of primogeniture—for Jack Enderby was a devout Conservative.

"Every stick and stone on the estate shall be strictly entailed on Matt at once," he said, rather illogically.

He pictured the nice string of hunters he would have in those great barrack-like stables before the year was out; then made another return upon his brother, and wondered what on earth he should say to him.

When the breakfast bell rang at last, poor Mr. Enderby felt anything but gay. The triumphal march died away into silence, and he would have sacrificed a good deal of prospective pleasure in the matter of wine and horses to have avoided the next half-hour.

As Jack, with rather a rueful countenance, came down into the square flagged hall, the Colonel entered it by the front door, letting a great rush of fresh westerly wind into the house with him. He came forward, holding out his hand to his brother, and looking him very frankly and kindly in the face. There was a fine serenity in his expression as he did so.

"Good morning, Jack," he said. "I've been round the dear old place. I'm glad to find that with all the knocking about the world that I've had, I have not forgotten a single thing here. It seems as if I hadn't been away a day."

He paused a moment, and then added quickly—

"God bless you, Jack, you and your wife, and the children! Good luck to you, and your boys after you; they're jolly, plucky little lads, and will keep up the honour of the old name gallantly."

Colonel Enderby turned away, and went across the hall to lay down his hat.

"You'll give me a bed now and then," he said, "won't you, if I want to get away from soldiering, and have a breath of my native air?"

Jack Enderby was touched, distressed, relieved, all at the same moment. The number and diversity of his emotions did not tend towards lucidity of thought or expression.

"Upon my word," he began, "I don't know what on earth to say to you, my dear fellow. I am in the most awfully awkward position, you know. I've been wanting to speak to you seriously ever since this all came out about the property. It isn't right, you know. It's infernally hard on you, though I don't want to say anything disrespectful about my poor father, of course. But, you know, he was very high handed with me; there was no getting near certain subjects. He was as close and reticent as could be about money matters. I give you my word I hadn't a notion till the day he died of the way he meant to leave things, and even then he only gave me a hint. I don't understand it. I tell you, I don't know how to look you in the face. I feel like—well, upon my word, I don't know what I do feel like," he added hopelessly. "It's most uncommonly awkward for me, and your taking it all in this wonderfully generous sort of way makes it all the worse, that it does."

Jack's voice grew a little shaky. He was genuinely moved, though his form of utterance was, it must be allowed, somewhat elementary.

The Colonel came across from the table on which he had laid down his hat. His brother's incoherent address had pleased him, and strengthened his willingness to accept the situation unreservedly.

"It's all perfectly right as it is," he answered. "You're cut out for a country squire, Jack—it will suit you a good deal better than preaching, eh? And Augusta is just fit for this sort of thing too. After all, what do I want with a great barrack of a house and an army of servants? There, we quite understand each other, and needn't say any more about it. By the way," he said presently, "it seems to me there is no end of keep on South Park, just across the river, simply wasting. I should put eighteen or twenty beasts on it at once, if I was in your place. I suspect you'll find the estate wants a lot of looking after at first. Things must have been a good deal neglected, since my father's not been able to get about and see into them himself."

Then the two men went into the dining-room, chatting of stock, and horses, and draining, and kindred subjects. And by the time breakfast was over, the triumphal march was thumping away as merrily as ever again in Jack Enderby's head.

That evening as he stood smoking meditatively, with his back to the library fire, the Colonel said—

"I think I shall get long leave, Jack, and go abroad for a time, when all this business is finally settled. I dare say Edmund Drake would go with me. You know, after all, I have seen next to nothing of Europe."

He turned round and steadied a big log that threatened to fall out on to the hearth with his foot.

"I feel as pleased as a schoolboy," he went on, "at having some money in my pocket to play ducks and drakes with."

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTIVE.

A BRILLIANT American writer has told us that in order to acquire a really comprehensive and scientific understanding of the personality of any given man or woman, it would be necessary to go back to the garden of Eden, and, beginning with our first parents, to trace the gradual evolution of the individual specimen down through the ages, from the cradle of the human race to the present day. This, doubtless, is strictly true. It is, therefore, all the more a matter for devout thankfulness that such a course is hedged about with obvious impossibility; for were it not so, there is no saying to what gigantic proportions the biography of the most obscure and uninteresting person might reach! Let me hasten to assure the reader that it is not for an instant proposed in the present case to peer into the backward abysm of things in this alarmingly voluminous and tedious manner, in the hope of therein discerning the ultimate causes of present effects. The narrator only desires, with all attainable brevity and conciseness, to make a few statements which may serve to throw some light upon the fortunes and conduct of certain actors in this little drama.

When Philip Enderby was about two and twenty an event took place which very sensibly affected his subsequent career. He discovered one fine day that he was very deeply in love—in love, too, with a young lady whose fortune would be pretty well enclosed by the trunks in which she packed her modest *trousseau*. The young man's tastes were neither showy nor expensive. He had, in fact, been blamelessly economical, eking out his pay as subaltern in a marching regiment, with the slender sum allowed him, rather grudgingly, by his father, and never forestalling quarter-day with inopportune demands for advances. Now he intimated that

an increase of allowance would enable him to marry, and that he wanted to marry very much indeed.

But, unfortunately for poor Philip, he was not, and never had been, a favourite with his father, whose stock of parental affection was rather exclusively bestowed upon his eldest son, Matthew, a handsome, headstrong, blustering fellow. Young Matt had left the university, where he had distinguished himself more in sporting and athletic than in learned circles, very much in debt. His father had just cleared him, so that Philip's love affair and request for help came at a singularly inconvenient season. In vulgar terms, Mr. Enderby didn't see it at all.

"What did that silly fellow Philip want with a wife and a houseful of squalling brats at his age?" he asked. "The boy hadn't half enough to do, kicking his heels at one garrison town after another. A little good hard work was what he wanted; that would knock the calf-love out of him soon enough. And then, who the devil is this Miss Cecilia Murray?" he added, not overcivilly. "I never heard of her. Let Philip take up with some girl with money, in the county, whom we know something about, and then it'll be plenty of time to talk about increased allowances, and so on. If they're so much in love, let 'em wait; that's the only thing I can recommend to 'em."

Lieutenant Enderby and Cecilia Murray proceeded to wait. Poor dears! there was nothing else very possible for them to do under the circumstances, since they were really attached to each other. They waited dutifully during the space of a year. Then the young lady began to lose her good looks a little. She was one of those thin, under-vitalized blondes who do not wear very well. It became daily more evident that waiting did not agree with her physically, though the constancy of her heart might be as great as ever. It was a pity, for Philip was blessed with a large share of patient devotion. He could have waited faithfully for a dozen years for his Cecilia, and sworn at the end of it that she was every bit as pretty as the first day he met her.

Cecilia Murray's mother, however, was a lady of experience, of resources, and of an eminently practical turn of mind. Her own marriage had not been exactly a conspicuous success, since her husband had added to various other incapacities the incapacity for living long, and had left his wife, as a still young and handsome woman, with a family of portionless daughters on her hands. Mrs. Murray permitted herself no illusions in certain matters. She had realized with disagreeable distinctness that, in the case of a girl having little besides personal attractions to recommend her, time is of supreme value on this side of five and twenty.

"With Cecilia's style of looks, freshness is everything," she said, with praiseworthy candour.

Acting upon this conviction the good lady did not warmly encourage her daughter's lover, whose material prospects struck her as lacking in any brilliant promise. She treated the young man with scant courtesy, and had, in fact, prepared to break off the match altogether, when an unlooked-for occurrence caused her suddenly to alter her opinion as to the eligibility of his suit.

It was in the winter-time that young Matthew Enderby, troubled about money matters and thirsty for some fresh amusement, elected to come to the quaint cathedral town in the north, where his brother's regiment was then quartered, and spend a week with him. Matt was in very low water again; his debts were heavy, and he could not make up his mind to tell his father frankly about them. Between horses and dogs, billiards and racing, and little runs up to London, the young gentleman had contrived to get his affairs into a sufficiently desperate condition. The Squire's temper was short at times even with his eldest and best-loved son; and Matt neither relished the idea of embarking in a slightly discreditable confession, or of risking his position of first favourite with his father. He was in the state of mind in which a man is willing to clutch at remote and improbable chances of salvation. Philip was devoted to him, he knew. Philip was a generous fellow and might be able to help him. At worst, Philip could be coaxed into breaking the whole thing to his mother—whose darling he was—and through her Matt might get the assistance he wanted without the unpleasantness of a personal statement. Filled with these vague hopes and roundabout intentions, he started on his pilgrimage to the northern city; but once there the desire to cut a figure, win admiration, and get himself talked about, returned upon him to the exclusion of more prudent considerations. The week of his stay extended itself into three, and during those three weeks Matthew Enderby might certainly congratulate himself on having made a mark—of a kind.

One night, or rather, early one morning, the two brothers, and a young fellow-officer of Philip's, Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay by name, were returning from a somewhat uproarious bachelor's dinner-party at a neighbouring country-house. Matt had taken more wine than was good for him; he had played cards and lost heavily. He was excited and angry, and tried to carry off his uncomfortable sensations by an extra amount of swagger and bluster. When the high two-wheeled dog-cart, in which the three young men were going to drive back, came to the door, Beau Pierce-Dawnay said, with a significant glance, to Philip—

"You'd better drive, old man. You're the steadiest of the lot, and that horse is a nasty vicious brute, and stumbles into the bargain."

But Matthew chose to regard this as an unwarrantable act of interference. He was in the humour to pick a quarrel with any one, and the other man's imperturbable good-temper had been a source of irritation to him all the evening. With some insolence, he said he had hired the trap himself; he knew very well what he was about; he had driven out, and he was going to drive back again. If Mr. Pierce-Dawnay was afflicted with nervousness he could walk, as far as he, Matt, was concerned, and welcome.

Beau, however, was far from quarrelsome; he got up behind the dog-cart with a good-natured laugh.

"Oh! I don't care a rap," he said. "I can stick on here tight enough. If the horse comes down, you and Philip 'll get the broken necks, you know, not I."

This speech did not tend to soothe Matthew Enderby. The horse justified the evil opinion given of it, and the young man, half from recklessness, half from temper, drove wildly, and frightened and fretted the ill-conditioned animal into a perfect fever. At last, at the top of a long steep hill, Matt lost all patience, and flung the reins petulantly to his brother.

"There, catch hold," he cried. "I shall get mad and cut the brute to pieces in a minute. I want to light my pipe. Hold him up, you fool! What are you at, letting him gander about the road in that fashion?"

Philip caught hold of the reins as best as he could; but the slap of them on the horse's back, as Matt threw them to him, had thoroughly scared it. The horse bolted. Philip was almost helpless; he was sitting low, and driving from the wrong side too; he could not get any purchase on the horse's mouth. Matt, perceiving the danger, made a clutch at the reins again, with an oath, and succeeded in giving a violent wrench to the right-hand one. The horse swerved, crossed its fore legs, and came down like a lump of lead on the hard frosty road.

The next thing Philip remembered was standing out in the roadway, with Pierce-Dawnay by him. He was not much hurt himself, but an indefinable dread was upon him. He went over to the further side of the broken-down carriage. There was a great heap of stones on the grass by the roadway,—and across the heap, just where the light of the lamp fell, lay poor young Matthew Enderby. He would never swagger, or play cards, or get into debt again, in this world.

Some grief is unapproachable; it resists sympathy almost as

an insult, and nurses itself in black silence and gloom. So it was with the Squire. He did not say much about his son's death, but he brooded over it in heavy speechless wretchedness. He could not accustom his mind to it; he had a sense of unpardonable injury and wrong. The house at Bassett became a sad place. Jack was up at college, and he went home as little as possible, though the fact of his being blessed by nature with many characteristics of the true Enderby type made his presence rather welcome than otherwise to his father. Towards Philip the Squire felt with deep unreasoning bitterness. The thought that this boy, for whom he had never cared greatly, who did not resemble the rest of the family either in looks or in temperament, would take his dashing elder brother's place, was hateful to him. Heretofore Philip had been simply uninteresting to his father; he was uninteresting no longer, he was obnoxious. If one of the two lads must go, why had not Fate selected him? The Squire could have spared him well enough, if it came to that.

Meanwhile, Philip himself was half broken-hearted. Death, in kindly fashion, rubs out the remembrance of past faults and follies, and leaves generally a fair and gracious picture of those we have loved. Their virtues seem altogether their own, and their vices no vital or integral part of them, but merely an unsightly smirch easily washed away and obliterated. Ever since the days when Matt's tin soldiers invariably won glorious victories on the floor of the Bassett Darcy nursery, over his own unsuccessful squadrons, lying prone and scattered on the ground, Philip had always admired his handsome, headstrong elder brother, and yielded him the first place willingly, even gladly. It was horrible that Matt, who was so brilliant and taking, who promised to support the family name in such an open-handed manner, who enjoyed life so vastly, should have been snatched away thus at a moment's notice.

But people were kind to Philip in his distress. Mrs. Murray, notably, was far kinder than she had ever been before. Her affection seemed to rise with extraordinary rapidity from zero to boiling-point. She welcomed him to her house, and quite advertised the fact of her daughter's engagement. Perhaps our friend Philip was pitiably inexperienced in those days. He accepted Mrs. Murray's attentions with the warmest gratitude, while it never occurred to him to inquire as to the root from which they might spring.

Mrs. Murray's affection, however, was tempered with astuteness. As time passed by, she began again to cast a doubtful eye on the young man's pretensions. He was in all probability secure

of a good position and large fortune now; but then, his father—as far as Mrs. Murray could make out—was the sort of man who might live for ever. Meanwhile, Cecilia had other admirers. The good lady weighed the bird in the hand against the birds in the bush; and, unless the former should develop sudden and unexpected plumpness, felt it would be advisable to relinquish her hold on it, and employ both hands in trying to catch one of those other birds that were still at liberty. She announced one day, to the young man's surprise, that she had really given him time enough; it looked bad for a girl to be hanging on with a long uncertain engagement like this; Mr. Enderby must shilly-shally no longer; Cecilia, poor dear child, was growing wretchedly worn and peaky; Mr. Enderby must marry her at once, on a good income—"such an income as will be in keeping with your position and prospects, you know"—or not at all.

Philip was a good deal startled, both by the announcement itself, and the tone in which it was conceived. There was one clause in it, notably, that offended both his taste and good feeling. Still he was very much in love. He wrote home to his mother to say he was coming, and then went down to Bassett resolved to renew his request to his father.

As long as he lived he remembered the events of that evening with painful distinctness. The dinner was not a cheerful one. The Squire was moody, and hardly spoke, except to give an order to the servants. Mrs. Enderby, with gentle tact and self-sacrificing sweetness, tried to ignore her husband's surly preoccupation and to talk as usual; but she was nervous, and the conversation sank away again into anxious silence. Philip found his father's manner anything but reassuring; as the saying is, his heart was in his mouth.

When Mrs. Enderby had left the dining-room, Philip told his little story—told it in a modest, quiet, manly way. There was a trace of pathos in the young man's bearing as he pleaded his cause, which some hearers would have found affecting. But Mr. Enderby was not easily affected. He turned his chair sideways, leaned his elbow on the table, and answered Philip over his shoulder, without taking the trouble to look at him.

"I told you my opinion of this foolish business of yours two years ago," he said; "it hasn't changed."

"You told us to wait, sir, and we have waited," answered Philip.

Mr. Enderby put his hand on the decanter standing by him, and refilled his glass.

"And the girl's got tired of waiting, I suppose—thinks you

can ask for whatever you like now and get it; and you think the same, no doubt. You're in a pretty hurry, I dare say, to step into your dead brother's shoes."

"You've no right to say that, sir," flashed out Philip, hotly. "I've given you no cause for such a supposition. Such a thought never entered my head, or hers either. She was good enough to care for me long ago, when certainly nobody could accuse her affection of being mercenary."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned the elder man slowly. "It's as well you should know just where you stand. If you thought your brother's death would improve your prospects, you were mistaken, that's all. It won't make a penny's difference to you, while I live."

Mr. Enderby swallowed down his glass of port, and then broke out suddenly and violently—

"But for you, Matt might have been alive now. You were drunk!"

Philip set his teeth hard. He went as white as the table-cloth before him.

"I don't drink, sir," he said, "and you know it. I was as sober as I am at this moment. Pierce-Dawnay was with us; he told you so at the time."

"Pierce-Dawnay was your friend, not Matt's. What proof have I that he didn't try to make the best of a bad job, and say what he could to shield you?"

"He's my friend, as you say; but he is a gentleman all the same, sir. He is not in the habit of telling lies."

How far sullen brooding grief had really perverted Matthew Enderby's reason, and made him harbour ugly suspicions against his son; how far he was merely actuated by a bullying desire to pain and humiliate the young man, it would be difficult to determine. Probably the two causes were too subtly mixed to be capable of separation. He sunk his head on his breast, and spoke with brutal deliberation.

"So much the worse for you, then, if you were sober. That doesn't put your conduct in a better light, as far as I can see. You can drive well enough when it pays you to drive well."

Philip sprang up from his place and came round in front of his father. His expression was full of uncontrollable amazement and horror.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" he cried. "What are you daring to hint at? Do you know what a dastardly thing your words seem to imply?"

Mr. Enderby looked up at him without raising his head.

His dull eyes were bloodshot and his face flushed with passion as he answered—

"By God! I tell you some people would say you knew very well what you were about when you pitched Matt out on to that cursed heap of stones. This is a fine property, and you were my second son. Foul play has been heard of for a lighter stake than that before now."

Some ten minutes later Philip rushed out into the hall, letting the door slam heavily behind him. As he did so, Mrs. Enderby moved forward in the firelight to meet him. She had been too anxious to rest by herself during this critical interview between her son and husband. She came back into the hall again, and stood near the wide open fireplace, listening with deepening fear and sorrow to the fierce voices in the dining-room.

Philip's tempest of anger died down as he caught sight of his mother. He put his arms round the frail, delicate woman in a sudden agony of tenderness.

"Come away to your room, mother," he said huskily; "I have got to say good-bye to you."

Poor Mrs. Enderby clung to him trembling.

"Oh, you have quarrelled!" she cried. "My dearest, if you love me, go back and make it up. Remember, your father is very quick-tempered; he often says things he regrets later, when he has recovered himself.. And he is very sore about dear Matt; you know how he loved him. He cannot submit to this trial; it makes him hasty and bitter. All his hopes were centred in Matt. And then, too, he has been troubled about business. He has been tried, Philip, cruelly tried and harassed. Remember all this, dear. Go and make it up with him, for my sake. If he has been a little hard with you, try to bear it—don't be stubborn, Philip; try to meet him half-way."

The young man did not answer till they had crossed the hall and entered Mrs. Enderby's little sitting-room. She stood by him, still clasping his hand, and looking with sweet piteous earnestness in his face.

"No, mother," he said; "the apology must come from him, not from me. It can't be made up unless he withdraws certain accusations he has made against me."

"Then it will never be made up," said Mrs. Enderby, in a low voice.

"He has accused me of a hideous action," Philip went on, "of something preposterous, vile, unnatural. I cannot tell you about it. I had better never have been born than have dreamed of it even for an instant."

Philip flung himself down on his knees before her, and held her about the waist, pressing his face against her gown.

"Mother, promise me that you, at least, will never doubt me; that you'll never listen to any suggestions he throws out about me; that you will keep me in your heart of hearts; that you'll never let anything cloud your love for me. Promise me, mother, to believe in me always, before I go."

In the poor boy's weakness Mrs. Enderby found an unexpected calm and strength.

"Stand up, Philip," she said gently. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked deep into his blue eyes. "I believe in you completely and truly, Philip. Nothing can shake my faith in you. This is a terrible delusion that has taken possession of your father's mind, the fruit of sorrow. You must not hold him accountable for it. Thoughts take hold of us sometimes which it is as impossible to drive away as it is to rid ourselves of disease itself. But they pass after a time, and we shake off the remembrance of them as we shake off the remembrance of a wretched dream, with infinite thankfulness and relief. Please God, it may be so in this case, and that before very long you may come back to me again. Ah! you are very dear to me, Philip. You have been the stay and comfort of my life; you have been son and daughter to me, both in one."

Mrs. Enderby could not manage to say more. The two stood looking at each other for a few minutes in silence. Then Philip bent down and kissed his mother, and went away.

The proverb says troubles rarely come singly. To Philip Enderby they seemed to come in legions just at this time. Mrs. Murray was pitiless; as the income was not forthcoming on the one part, the bride was not forthcoming on the other. She developed an admirable sense of duty—feared that the young man must have behaved shamefully to his father to cause this rupture and denial. A bad son is calculated to make but a sorry husband. Cecilia's happiness must not be endangered. Mrs. Murray felt it would be both immoral and impolitic to put a premium on filial disobedience. On the highest grounds she therefore entirely refused to think of Mr. Enderby as a possible son-in-law.

So there was an end to Philip's budding romance. At one stroke he found himself bereft alike of parents, home, and mistress, and thrown upon the world as a mere soldier of fortune. With his faithful and affectionate nature, he was bound to suffer very deeply under this accumulation of misfortunes. I do not wish to draw a fancy portrait of the young man, and hold him up

as a model of fortitude and virtue. On the contrary, I must admit that for a time after the final breaking off of his engagement, it seemed a little doubtful whether Philip was not determined to set out on that unprofitable journey, commonly known as "going to the bad." He was so miserable, poor fellow, that he was sorely tempted to drown misery in debauch. But, perhaps his mother's prayers, perhaps a certain innate purity and sweetness, which at bottom made riot disgusting to him, called Philip back before he had sunk very deep in the slough. He recovered his footing on the solid ground of good living, and, not without a hot sense of shame and self-reproach in face of his past aberrations, took, once and for all, to wiser courses.

Great public events, too, came at this crisis indirectly to his aid. The year 1854 saw the beginning of a war which we are now assured was highly discreditable, if not actually iniquitous. Be that as it may, the fact remains—happily or unhappily, I know not which—that men may fight as gallantly in a bad cause as a good one, and that the moral effect on individuals may be as salutary, when they suffer, struggle, and endure in an unjust quarrel as in a just one. Philip Enderby began to show what spirit he was truly of. He emerged, he distinguished himself. Later, during the hideous months of the Indian Mutiny, his name obtained a rather enviable notoriety. The plain slender young fellow, whose quiet ways had made him something of a butt for the wits of his regiment, developed both mentally and physically. India, for some years after the rebellion, offered brilliant opportunities to soldiers who had the wit to take advantage of them; and Philip's patience, constancy, and courage had already marked him out as a person to be entrusted with delicate or hazardous work. As the young man could not marry his love, he decided to marry his sword, and contrived, as time went on, to carve out for himself a sufficiently distinct place in the world with that somewhat uncultivated instrument.

A certain simplicity and directness of purpose never left him. But as he grew older, Philip Enderby was not a person with whom it was advisable to take a liberty. It came to be understood that some matters must not be spoken of lightly before him—a woman's reputation must not be smiled away, or a man's moral delinquencies too easily condoned. Younger men were disposed to think him a trifle too rigid in matters of virtue and religion for the entire comfort of his neighbours—a person given to slight exaggerations, stern, and not altogether easy to get on with. Yet every one admitted that he was kindly too, a faithful friend, and a fine officer. At eight and forty the Colonel's

position was acknowledged and assured. He had escaped many dangers, resisted many temptations; and as yet, perhaps fortunately for himself, he had been very true to the memory of his first love.

And Mrs. Enderby? Loving both husband and son, nothing was left her but to live by faith. But faith, unassisted by recurrent and encouraging revelations, is a lean and far from nourishing diet. Mrs. Enderby did not thrive upon it. As day after day and month after month passed by, without any change or sign of relenting on the part of the Squire towards Philip, faith began to grow weak, and Mrs. Enderby began to grow weak also. She hungered after her boy. He had been a good and gentle son to her ever since the time when, clad in a round holland pinafore and white tucked drawers, he had trotted after her up and down the long passages at Bassett Darcy, and about the sheltered, high-walled gardens, fragrant with the scent of pinks and mignonette. Later, he had never failed to scrawl her a weekly letter from school, containing an ill-spelled chronicle of rudimentary joys and sorrows. And afterwards, when he went into the army—while through many wakeful nights, in the great blue bedroom over the hall, she had wrestled in prayer for him, and agonized over those, to her, mysterious temptations that are supposed specially to beset young gentlemen of the upper classes—she had always found him come home to her, as quiet and simple and tenderly thoughtful as ever.

Only once did she venture to break the silence which her husband maintained upon the subject of his quarrel with his son; and then the Squire's fierce, unreasoning violence terrified her into patient submission again. Mrs. Enderby could cling to her love, but she could not fight for it. As time went on, she fell into a strange habit of sitting silent and unemployed in the large, dusky saloon, overlooking the broad, smooth lawn and lazy river. She would not go out much; she shrank from meeting her neighbours, or even from stepping in and out of the cottages, with a basket of dainties on her arm, which she distributed along with the most sulphureous of tracts, and the very mildest of personal advice. Sometimes she seemed to be bewildered, and hardly to know what she was doing. Unpleasant rumours got about concerning her; people said poor Mrs. Enderby's mind was going.

Medical science, in the neat and drily attentive person of Dr. Rideout of Slowby—it was before the day of Dr. Symes and the local pre-eminence of Tullingworth—owned itself baffled. There was no organic disease discoverable, and yet the poor lady was evidently sinking.

The feeble flame of Mrs. Enderby's life flickered up fitfully whenever her husband entered the room. Hope lingers with us, and old habits assert themselves even when the sands have run very low, and the feet of the mourners are near the door. She told him that there was "nothing really the matter. She was only very weak, and would be better again in a day or so."

But the day on which Mrs. Enderby would be better never dawned. That flickering flame sank slowly down till it was quenched in darkness, and Mrs. Enderby lay dead. She had paid the penalty of too great faith and love. Virtues should be of a strictly limited order, one sometimes fears, if they are to bring their possessors in a comfortable dividend on this side the grave.

Matthew Enderby missed his wife very keenly. He had loved her truly, according to his lights. The custom of many years had made her presence necessary to him, and her death seemed somewhat of an impertinence. It was the only independent action she had taken, save a certain tremulous support given to Philip's love affair, since he married her. Mr. Enderby could hardly understand it. He was sad, lonely, angry; and his anger, not perhaps unnaturally, vented itself in implacable hostility towards the son, whose action, he persuaded himself, was, if indirectly, still certainly connected with his wife's long illness and death.

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BOOK SECOND.

A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREADS BEGIN TO CROSS.

COMPARED with many of its sister towns situated along the shores of the Gulf of Genoa, Terzia cannot claim to be a very pretty place. It is too full of the whir of machinery, the clank and clang of hammers, and the dust of workshops to be altogether pleasant. The beautiful old ship-building trade, formerly the wealth of this part of the coast, is fast dying out; but a few half-finished wooden vessels, with an olive branch at the prow, stand on the stocks in the large half-deserted yards on the grey sea-shore. Iron and steam, strong and unpoetic, have it pretty much all their own way nowadays. The famous Corniche Road, too, is here narrowed to a sort of straggling street between high vineyard walls and tall painted houses; and—whether it appears as a sea of pale mud, or is smothered in paler and at least equally objectionable dust—is always, wet or dry, a perfect pandemonium of rough two-wheeled waggons, loaded with heavy cotton bales, sacks of rags, or with great barrels piled up to an alarming height, and of straining mules and horses, and yelling drivers, and grating tramcars.

Yet if you leave the busy little town, with its teeming streets, and wander up the steep paved lanes behind between the vineyards, and if, when you have passed the last of the red and yellow walls, and step out into the open olive grounds above, you stop and turn, and look back, the scene is very moving and inspiring even here. For, you are in Italy after all—beautiful, passionate, terrible Italy.

About a quarter of a mile out of Terzia, going eastward towards Genoa, you come to some rusty iron gates in the high, red-plastered wall that skirts the road on the left. A broad carriage-way leads from these gates first across flat market-gardens,

in which the peasants work, with sleeves and trousers stripped up, showing bare, muscular, brown arms and legs; then, turning sharply to the left, it runs at the foot of a natural cliff of buff-coloured rock, supported here and there by masonry. After thirty yards or so the road turns to the right and climbs the hill, shaded on the south by a line of dwarfed and distorted fir trees, and with broad spaces of grass on each side of it, bright in the spring-time with flame-coloured gladiolas, red orchis, and blue-feather hyacinth. Another zigzag, through vineyard terraces and broken rocks, among which the fig trees root themselves, and straggle a maze of smooth grey branches, grey roots and glossy dark-green leaves, and then at last you reach the final bit of the ascent—a broad carriage-way still, gravelled with little black and white pebbles from the neighbouring beach, a wall of brick and rock on the left hand, and on the right a drop into the vineyard below. On either hand the road is bordered with hedges of pink monthly roses, wherein the cicalas, with their great eyes and foolish faces, sit fiddling all day long in the hot sunshine. The carriage-drive ends at last in a wide gravelled terrace in front of a small orange-red stuccoed villa.

Standing on this high terrace, where the noises of the road, the railway, and the town—the ring of hammers, crack of whips, and wild cry of the muleteers—reach you, softened and harmonized by distance, the scene is a very noble one.

In the south the purple sea rises and meets the sky-line. The grey sweep of the narrow beach trends away in a bold curve, here bordered by gleaming houses, and there broken by some dark densely wooded promontory, past cape after cape, and headland after headland to the westward. Just below lies the town, built in massive blocks of tall many-windowed houses, which have flat or low-pitched roofs, and are painted every conceivable colour, from the lightest green or yellow to the deepest blue or chocolate. At the back of the town, and rising tier above tier up the sloping foot-hills, are vineyards and gardens, with now and again some gaily coloured villa, or the tall campanile of a village church. Here and there long lines of cypresses follow each other in a dark and mystic procession down the hillside, marking the boundary of a landowner's property. Above, the olive grounds stretch in a misty silver belt around the slopes. Above them are thickets of great white heath, and sweet bay and myrtle, with the quaint, blotted form of an umbrella pine, disengaging itself sharply in places from the undergrowth. Above, again, are dusky fir-woods, and then at last your eyes rest on the bare arid mountain sides towering up in the searching sunlight, the summits crowned by a

pilgrimage church or monastery, or rising naked, unadorned, and harsh against the sky.

The Apennines behind Terzia may be described as a giant hand pointing seaward, with deep ravines and watercourses between the gigantic outstretched fingers. Only the town and beach and road are pale; all the rest—woods, mountains, rich purple sea, and rich purple sky—glow and palpitate with intensity of colour; while in the extreme west, above the deep blue of far-off hills and capes, soaring up into the clear ether, rise the glittering peaks and dazzling snow-wastes of the Maritime Alps.

Towards the latter end of April, 1877, about six months after old Matthew Enderby's death, one burning afternoon, the subject for a delightful little picture might have been found on the terrace up at the Villa Mortelli.

A low broad parapet of stone, stuccoed and painted the same orange-red as the house, guards the terrace in front. Looking down over it there is a sheer drop of some five and twenty, or perhaps thirty feet, into the vineyard below. At this time the leaves were just breaking, and a delicate veil of green spread itself over the face of the vineyards.

In the corner of the terrace, away from the carriage-drive, with her back against a trellised and somewhat dilapidated arbour, smothered in Wistaria and climbing roses, sat a young girl. She rested one elbow on the low wall by her side, and held in the other hand a great red umbrella;—not one of those mean little scarlet parasols that ladies affected so much some few years ago, but a real, honest, peasant's umbrella, big enough to shelter a whole family from sun or rain, and decorated round the edge of it with a barbaric pattern, woven in staring black and white and yellow.

The young lady was very simply dressed in a plain light cotton gown, which had, however, an admirable air of freshness and crispness in every fold and frill of it. Her figure was slight but delicately rounded, and her face was charming; not strictly beautiful, perhaps, for there were delightful little touches of individuality about it which prevented its belonging to any stereotyped and obvious order of female loveliness. It was just that—an entirely charming face, bright, out-looking, and with a sort of morning clearness upon it, and an effect of guilelessness which made one disposed to treat this young lady more as an attractive child than as a person who had already reached the tiresome period of life technically described as—years of discretion.

Her hair—fair, with golden lights and ruddy shadows in it—was gathered up high at the back, showing the shape of her head, and curled prettily upon her forehead. Her complexion was fair,

too, with a clear healthy tinge of red in her cheeks; the nose, a little uncertain in line, but daintily cut about the tip and small curved nostrils; the mouth round and sweet, though wanting in those generous curves about the lips which make some mouths so nobly beautiful. Her eyes, a clear blue-grey, were set perhaps just a trifle too near together; still, they were finely shaped, and opened well. There was nothing too positive, too definite, in the girl's face. Her long eyelashes and arched eyebrows were but a few shades darker than her bright hair.

Altogether she was charming; and charming, too, with that peculiar indescribable charm that belongs to certain women—a magnetic quality not dependent on faultlessness of physical beauty for its existence, but a something beguiling and upsetting, especially to the masculine sense, which seems to emanate from the whole person.

Certain women have a singular power of establishing a relation —I do not know how else to put it—with almost every man they come across. How it is done I cannot pretend to say; for one may be very sensible of an effect, and remain entirely unable to analyze the cause of it. Only I fancy that every woman whose name has come down to us through the long centuries with a glamour of magic about it, so that the very sound of it makes the blood pulse more quickly, must, in some degree, have possessed that strange power. Helen must have had it, or Troy town would never have suffered long sorrow and fire and final desolation. All those gracious and noble ladies must have had it whose remembrance is enshrined for ever in the "*Ballade des Dames du temps jadis*," of François Villon, thief, profligate, and writer of imperishable verse. Catherine of Siena must have had it, or never, surely, would popes and priests and princes have listened so humbly to her chiding. Julie d'Étange—most moving, if most imprudent of fictitious heroines—must have had it, or M. de Wolmar would never have married her, any more than Saint-Preux would have broken his heart for her among the rocks above the blue lake at Meillerie. These, and many more: for the list would be a long one of potent and perilous names. Yes, we had better forget them, we sensible middle-aged people, and let them fade away into the great unknown along with "the snows of yester year."

In saying all this I do not, for a moment, desire to imply that there was anything very wonderful, extraordinary, or epoch-making about the girl sitting in the Italian sunshine, on the terrace up at the little red villa; nor do I, for a moment, purpose to compare her with those queens of fiction, life, and legend whose memory comes over us with so dangerous a strength.

The indefinable charm I have spoken of greets you in many and very different places. It belongs exclusively to no one age, or class, or nation; it may be found both in saint and sinner. It may look out at you alike from the face of a labourer's daughter, bending over a steaming and prosaic wash-tub, and from that of a child in the perky, progressive class-room of a modern board-school, and from that of some well-bred and well-known woman moving in the sacred, innermost circle of London or Parisian society. Still it is not very common—perhaps fortunately—all the same. The plain, steady, common-sense work of the world would hardly keep on quite so regularly if it was very common. And it is only fair to add, too, that hundreds and thousands of women have been honoured highly and loved devotedly who possessed no trace of it. It is a peculiar gift to chosen individuals; it comes to them by nature, and was never learnt, nor taught of any yet. Only, wherever you meet with it, the colour grows richer and the pace faster, and Love laughs aloud with the hope of another victim; and life either spreads out before you strangely fair, and deep, and full, or is stained for ever after with the memory of a great regret.

On the low red wall, just beyond the shadow cast by the big umbrella, sitting hunched together basking in the sunshine, was a good-sized brown monkey; a grotesque and sorrowful little figure, curiously in contrast with that of the young girl.

Centuries of disappointment and fruitless endeavour seemed to have wrinkled the loose skin on his forehead. Occasionally he reached round and scratched his back with one thin, brown hand, or made a fierce, rapid grab at the small green lizards that ran glittering up and along the sunny wall. If the girl moved, ever so slightly, he looked round sharply at her, with that quick up-lifting of the eyebrows and gleam of the sad shrewd eyes, which go to make a monkey's face so unspeakably restless and painful.

The cicalas shrilled in the rose-bushes, while the green frogs, at the old tank away along the vineyard path to the left, kept up the chorus immortalized by Aristophanes. The jangle of bells came down from one of the village churches on the hillside above, and the grate of wheels and cry of the muleteers came up from the crowded road below. Little playful winds swept across from the deep mountain valleys, scattered a few loose petals of the roses on the trellised arbour, and then wandered away out to sea. And the charming girl sat dreaming, looking lazily out over the brilliant scene from under the rosy shade of her red umbrella, while the brown monkey beside her basked in the broad sunshine,

musing, perhaps, in perplexity of spirit, on the many griefs and wrongs of his strange half-human race.

There seemed a pause, a space of sweet sunny waiting, up at the Villa Mortelli that afternoon. The lights were lit, and the curtain was up, and the stage was set and ready. When would the rest of the actors come on?

About five o'clock the young lady's lazy reverie was brought to a close by the rattling of a carriage up the steep road between the rose-hedges, and the grinding of the loose gravel under its wheels as it drew up at the front door.

She had watched the carriage ever since it turned in at the iron gates off the high-road—had stretched herself a little, and sat up with a growing expression of interest and vivacity in her pretty face.

"Malvolio," she said, leaning towards the monkey as she spoke, "I perceive that there has been a slight mistake. Your poor master is grilling himself quite needlessly at Terzia railway station all this while. His temper will be execrable when he returns. He will not be able to forgive himself for having been coerced into committing a civility. Prepare yourself, my dearest little beast," she added; "there will shortly be remarkable developments in the situation."

The monkey gazed at her anxiously, as though trying hard to understand. He scratched his ugly little head, wrinkled up his forehead, and grinned rather wickedly. The girl watched him attentively for a moment or two, and then laughed gaily and softly, as a child does with a delicious anticipation of coming amusement.

"Anything is delightful in the way of a change, isn't it, my excellent Malvolio?" she said to the monkey.

Colonel Enderby was a long-suffering man. As a rule he could put up resignedly with a large amount of discomfort. But he had come to visit Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, at the Villa Mortelli, out of the purest sense of duty. She was the widow of an old friend, and the Colonel had a high respect for the claims of friendship, even in the second degree. Still, it must be allowed that where duty is the sole motive power, small annoyances are liable to take a very strong hold upon the imagination; and as he got out of the carriage, Colonel Enderby certainly felt far from urbane. He was choked with dust and roasted with the blazing afternoon sun. He had left his travelling companion seated over the remnants of an excellent luncheon in the shaded hall of a Genoese *café*. The thought of Edmund Drake smoking peacefully in that cool and stately place had been distinctly irritating. He could

have found it in his heart to use some rather forcible expressions concerning these few miles of road out from Genoa. He was prepared to state on oath, if necessary, that they were simply the most hot, arid, ugly, and generally insufferable miles of road in the known world.

The untidy plausible Italian coachman rang the bell, and then banged casually on the door with the handle of his whip, to hurry the servants within; but no sound was audible indoors. Bells, apparently, were answered with truly artistic deliberation at the little red villa.

Colonel Enderby stamped his feet to settle his trousers down over his boots, and beat himself a little with his gloves to get some of the pale dust off his coat, looking rather gloomy and injured all the while. It was extremely unpleasant to him to be otherwise than absolutely neat and clean. He glanced critically at the pair of small, weedy carriage-horses, who stood with heads hanging wearily down and streaming flanks. Then he turned impatiently to the door again.

"Nuisance it is, waiting!" he said. "I suppose this is the right house? Why on earth don't they answer the bell?"

Looking up as he spoke, he became aware, for the first time, of the presence of the young lady, who stood watching him from the other side of the terrace. He was conscious of a slight shock of surprise, and of a sincere hope that she might not have overheard his hasty observation. He lifted his hat, and keeping it in his hand, passed round in front of the horses' heads and walked across the terrace towards her.

The girl, too, came a few steps forward. Her light cotton gown showed a rosy red in the shade of her big umbrella. Her eyes were very bright, and she was smiling. It was a smile not easily forgotten—brilliant, irresistible, delicious to look at, and liable to retain a prominent place subsequently in the mental vision.

As she came forward the monkey scrambled down off the wall and followed her, seizing the folds of her dress with his long narrow hands for support. He chattered angrily at the carriage and the approaching stranger—his queer wizened countenance distorted with emotion. Meanwhile the good-looking Italian driver, leaning lazily against the nearest of his smoking horses, laughed and made grimaces at the poor little creature, exciting him to a painful pitch of impotent fury.

"Colonel Enderby," said the girl, looking up at him, and still smiling, "I am afraid you have altogether forgotten me. I am so sorry. Indeed, it amounts to being a little humiliating for me, for

I have the most perfect recollection of you. You were always so kind to me."

Philip Enderby felt slightly embarrassed. He was not accustomed to be greeted after this fashion by unusually pretty young ladies. Since the far-off days of Cecilia Murray, his experience in the matter of women's society had neither been very large nor very intimate. He had an almost quixotic reverence for the sex—such a reverence as cynical persons are wont to say can only be maintained at the expense of the presence of accurate knowledge.

There was a frankness in the young lady's expression, and a graceful self-possession in her manner, however, which the Colonel found reassuring. He answered her slowly, perhaps a trifle stiffly; yet he could not help smiling too, her face in its expression had such a bewitching fearlessness.

"I ought to know you, though nine years have made a good deal of difference, it must be owned. You are Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

The girl laughed softly, and put up her eyebrows with a little air of protestation and regret.

"Oh yes," she said; "nine years make a lamentable difference, of course. They change simple Jessie into elaborate Miss Pierce-Dawnay, and they put dolls and bonbons out of the question. That last is especially trying for me. I am just as fond of bonbons as ever. Your taste in dolls was not—well, how shall I say it?—exactly professional, Colonel Enderby, but in bonbons I found it ravishing."

There was a carefulness and distinctness in Miss Pierce-Dawnay's pronunciation which one frequently remarks in English persons who are constantly in the habit of speaking a foreign language. Her words did not run into each other in the slipshod fashion too common even among our well-bred and highly educated countrywomen. They seemed to stand apart, and each maintain a full and separate value. This little mannerism has something both pretty and arresting to the attention in it.

Philip, quiet, serious, middle-aged man as he was, felt delicately amused and interested in the charming young creature before him. It is very strangely pleasant, as one gets on in years and the glory of the day grows pale, to meet with something as fresh and gay and fearless as this girl. To the Colonel there was a touch of pathos in her radiant youthfulness. She struck him as a charming child even now, and he answered her little speech with a certain smiling gravity.

"We might manage the bonbons still, I dare say, if you wish it."

"Oh," she cried, "thank you! I have yet, then, something to live for, and you are doubly welcome. To tell the truth, we have been slightly wanting in amiability and animation lately here at the Villa Mortelli. Your arrival is every way agreeable; we have wanted something to change the current of our thoughts."

Colonel Enderby bowed his recognition of this civil observation.

"But mamma will be impatient to see you," the young lady continued. "And, meanwhile, will you kindly discharge that intolerable driver, who is nearly sending our poor Malvolio into fits by jeering at him? Then we will come indoors, please. Ah! there is Parker. She will tell you what to pay that wretched driver. They always overcharge; it is their recognized system. Parker is the only member of this establishment who can manage them."

The person indicated, a tall, angular, hard-featured woman, stood in the doorway, delivering herself of a series of short observations in curiously bad Italian.

"Antonio is to take Colonel Enderby's things down to his hotel later, Miss Jessie," she said, looking sharply at Philip, and addressing his companion. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is waiting for you in the drawing-room. Marie's taken in tea."

The Colonel, assisted, whether he would or no, by Parker—who indulged in biting comments on the shiftiness of Italians in general, and Genoese cab-drivers in particular—finally succeeded in satisfying the demands of the coachman. Then the long whip cracked, and the tired little horses jerked up their heads, and the carriage rattled away down the steep road between the pink rose-hedges in the southern sunshine.

"Shall we come indoors now?" asked Jessie.

She closed her umbrella, and, picking up Malvolio in her arms, turned towards the house. As she did so, Colonel Enderby was sensible of a quick movement of repulsion, almost of disgust.

"Surely you are not going to carry that monkey," he said hastily. "Here, let me take it."

"Oh no, he would perhaps bite you," she replied; "and that would be such an unfortunate beginning to your visit. He is very spiteful with strangers. But I often carry him when his master, my cousin, Bertie Ames, is not at hand—don't I, Malvolio?"

Colonel Enderby could offer no further objection, yet somehow he did not at all like it. Perhaps it was the result of a long night journey through from Paris; perhaps he had got sunstroke standing talking on the terrace without his hat; but he was undoubtedly aware of a strange and decidedly disagreeable sensation

as he passed from the glow and splendour of colour and sunshine outside into the dim chill entrance-hall of the Villa Mortelli. It seemed to him as if somewhere else, long, long ago, all this had happened before. He knew it was a foolish, absurd fancy, and it annoyed him. Yet surely it was not the first time he had followed the graceful flitting figure of this young girl up the cold, white, marble staircase, while the weird face of the still chattering and but half-pacified monkey grinned back at him over her shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUMONT PIERCE-DAWNAY'S WIDOW.

THE Villa Mortelli is a plain house. It has seen its best days, and everything about it has grown a little tumble-down and antiquated. The present owner is only too happy to let the upper suites of rooms to any family, Italian or foreign, with a taste for quiet and economy, which can be induced to rent them; while the surroundings of the house are left pretty much to their own devices, subject to a periodic tidying up on the part of the peasant overseer, who looks after the vineyards and market-gardens below.

It is a decidedly plain house. The ground-floor on either side the front door has but a couple of heavily grated windows in it, and is given over to kitchens and chilly flagged store-rooms opening into a central hall. Above is a low *entresol*, with ugly little square windows overlooking the terrace; and above, again, are two floors of large and rather handsome rooms. The lower of these two suites opens at the western end on to the flat roof of a building originally, no doubt, designed for a coach-house and covered yard. The roof is supported on an arcade of arches and massive square pillars, and covers quite a considerable area of ground. The house, with the said building or *loggia*, is painted, as has already been stated, a deep orange red. The windows have outside wooden shutters to them, originally a vivid blue in colour, but now weathered by the action of the rain and sun and sea-wind to a dull neutral tint.

Beyond the house, on the same level as the terrace, and divided from it by a dilapidated wooden paling, is a square flower-garden; a neglected wilderness of a place, a mere tangle of roses, camellias, lilacs, and other flowering shrubs, with lilies and hyacinths below them, straggling about the ill-kept beds as they please. Some lemon trees are trained against the back wall

facing the southern sun; and in the centre of the garden, where the four weedy gravel paths meet, stands a clump of not over-productive orange trees. On the low red boundary wall are large earthenware pots of fantastic shapes containing plants of tall sword-leaved aloes.

Immediately behind the house rises a cliff, up which a light iron staircase leads from the back of the *loggia* to the vineyard above. Higher is a slope of coarse grass, the rising ground being crowned with a thick little wood of scrub oak, ilex, and fir.

Jessie, with the monkey in her arms, went quickly upstairs, and, crossing the landing, threw open the tall narrow doors of the drawing-room.

"Mamma," she said, in her clear detached tones, "here is Colonel Enderby. He has driven out all the way from Genoa."

The inside of the little red villa is in harmony with the exterior. It, too, has seen its best days. The room into which the Colonel found himself ushered by his charming guide was long and high, with a vaulted and richly painted ceiling. The two southern windows were shaded with half-closed shutters and red blinds; while the one at the far end of the apartment, draped like the others with faded yellow brocade curtains, stood wide open on to the flat roof beyond. The sun slanting in through it filled the air with warm mellow light. There was an effect of worn-out splendour about the room. The covers of the large couches and chairs showed frayed and threadbare at the points of greatest contact; the plentiful gilding of consol-tables and mirror-frames was a good deal tarnished: but the glorious sunshine streaming in enriched and harmonized it all. Even the marble floor, but sparsely covered with rugs, looked only agreeably cool in the glowing atmosphere.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, with both hands outstretched, and a considerable rustling of full black silk and grenadine skirts, came rapidly across the room to greet her guest.

"Ah, my dear friend!" she exclaimed, "this is indeed a pleasure. How very good it is of you to come to me!"

Colonel Enderby bowed over the handsome woman's hands as he held them.

"You are too kind," he answered gallantly. "I engaged long ago always to obey your summons."

"I know—I know you promised. But it is a long time ago. It is so long, too, since we have met at all that I really scrupled to trouble you—the more so, perhaps, because you have been very helpful to me in the past. People say I am exacting; that I demand too much. Those are odious accusations, you know.

They make one nervous of asking a service from even one's best friends, at times."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay put up one hand, and pushed back, rather impatiently, the folds of the black lace mantilla which was fastened across her dusky hair, and hung down softly about her shoulders.

"I have been in great perplexity," she said. "Your visit is most welcome."

She spoke rapidly, and there was a ring of sincerity, almost of enthusiasm, in her reception of him, in which a vainer man than Philip Enderby might have found occasion for a pleasant sense of elation. Luckily, however, he was not given to ebullitions of personal vanity. He supposed the lady's pecuniary affairs were in disorder—it had happened more than once before now—and that she wanted him to set them straight for her. He possessed a very romantic reverence for womankind in the mass; but, all the same, he was satisfied to take up an extremely practical position with regard to this lady. He had no sentimental hankerings after relations of an intimate or emotional character.

And yet Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, at two and thirty, with her well-set head, pure oval face, and luminous brown eyes, greeting her guest so charmingly in the pale, faded room at the Villa Mortelli, was unquestionably a woman whom you might easily have been excused for desiring to improve your acquaintance with. She was tall, with a fine, supple figure, and stately carriage. Her black hair had none of that greasy gloss on it which too often makes black hair anything but a beauty. Her complexion was dull, it is true; but her skin was even in tone and delicate in texture. She looked like a woman who loved an indoor life, and warm, fragrant atmosphere. There was a richness of suggestion, so to speak, and an intensity about her such as usually go with mental and social rather than with physical activity. The Colonel was aware that his hostess's course had been a slightly original and erratic one; otherwise, listening to her fluent speech and noting her rather stormy beauty, he might very well have wondered a little why this striking-looking young woman had elected to shut herself up, with her step-daughter, in the solitude of a quiet country house.

"You are not the least altered," she went on, moving back a step or two, and looking at her guest carefully.

"I wonder whether that is good news or not," answered Philip, smiling. He was a trifle put about by this attentive scrutiny.

"Undoubtedly it is good news."

Eleanor laid her hand lightly on Colonel Enderby's arm.

"You have come, and I am very grateful. There is the whole matter. Now let us have some tea. You must be tired after your long journey. Come and sit down comfortably."

"I am so disgustingly dirty," remarked the Colonel, as he followed his hostess up the long room. He had been wishing to make this apology from the moment he came in. "I am really ashamed of appearing before you in this state."

Eleanor stopped a moment, and turned to him.

"The same little mania as of old about dust, Colonel Enderby," she said. "Ah! that reminds me of so much."

During the foregoing conversation the girl had been standing aside, watching her two companions with a gay little air of interest and amusement. Now she moved away, and stepped out on to the loggia.

"Mamma is going to have reminiscences," she murmured. "We will retire, Malvolio, and return at a more convenient season."

"Dear child," called Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay after her; "remember the sun. Have you got a hat?"

"The awning is up," answered the girl, looking back and smiling brightly—less, perhaps, at her step-mother than at Philip—"and the sun never affects me. I am going to watch for poor Bertie."

"We thought you would come straight to Terzia by train," Eleanor said to him. "I did not like your arriving there and finding no one to receive you. I deputed my cousin, Mr. Ames, to go and meet you."

She sat down by the tea-table, and began rearranging the cups and saucers. A silence fell on her, and for a few moments she appeared to be somewhat oblivious of the presence of her guest.

Philip sat down in the nearest chair, crossed his legs, and slowly pulled first one side and then the other of his thick moustache with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand in a meditative fashion. Several things in the course of the last hour had surprised him a little. He did not feel quite at home with his new circumstances.

As Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay handed him his teacup, she looked up with a sudden change of expression.

"What do you think of my step-daughter?" she asked.

The question was so wholly unexpected that Colonel Enderby paused for a moment before answering it. During that brief pause he was acutely sensible of the clear tones of the girl's voice—talking half-mockingly to the monkey—which came in, along with the sunshine, at the open window.

"I think that your step-daughter has grown into a very beautiful person," he said at last, with a certain seriousness.

"Ah, you too!" cried his hostess.

Perhaps there was the faintest savour of irritation in her manner. Any way, she did not enlarge upon the subject. She talked on, pleasantly enough, about less personal matters—friends in England, the Colonel's journey and so forth, for some minutes, then asked one or two questions about Matthew Enderby's last illness, about Bassett Darcy and the disposition of the property.

"It seems to me you have been very badly used, Colonel Enderby," she said at last. "And I suppose, with your usual generosity, you submitted to be despoiled without a single protest."

The Colonel smiled. He was not accustomed to the overflowings of feminine sympathy, or the picturesqueness of feminine statement. They struck him both as amusing and violent.

"That is rather a hard way of putting it, you know," he answered.

He did not particularly enjoy discussing his private affairs with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay—or any one else, for that matter.

"My father had a perfect right to leave his property as he liked. He knew that I was provided for under my poor mother's will."

"But then there is a recognized custom in these things. You must have always expected to possess the place eventually. You must have looked forward to it—dreamed about it, taken it for granted. No, it seems to me a wretched injustice."

"Hardly as bad as that," said the Colonel. He wanted to take the matter as lightly as possible. "I've wandered about the world too much to be fit to settle down, at my age, into a regular country squire—at least, that is what my father thought, no doubt—and quite reasonably too. Of course, being so much out of England, I have lost touch of a whole lot of things—it was inevitable. Now, my brother has been on the spot all the time; he knows all about the place, and so is much more fitted for that sort of life than I am. He's a capital fellow," added Colonel Enderby, heartily. "He's a first-rate farmer and sportsman, and a useful man, too, in the county. He's got a lot of common sense. Then he's married, you know, and has a family, and that, of course, makes a difference."

"I really can't see that it makes the smallest difference." Eleanor looked up at him very prettily. "A man at your age—specially, perhaps, in your profession—is in the prime of life. You haven't taken a vow of celibacy, I suppose? You may marry too."

Colonel Enderby shook his head. He looked at his boots, he smiled, but with no exuberant cheerfulness.

"No, no, I shall never marry, my dear madam," he answered quietly.

At this moment Jessie came in at the open window.

"Bertie has arrived," she said. "He has driven back. He will certainly be very cross."

"I am sorry," remarked Philip, getting up and setting down his teacup, "that I should have given Mr. Ames all this unnecessary trouble."

Jessie turned to him with the most dainty and reconciling air of amusement. Certainly she was admirably pretty.

"Don't be sorry. It does not in the least signify. Bertie is rather grateful in his heart of hearts to any one who will supply him with a legitimate excuse for ill-temper. He enjoys being"—the girl made a graceful little outward gesture with her two hands —"like that, you know, slightly ill-used and injured."

"Jessie, you are malicious." Eleanor spoke sharply, and her face darkened.

The young lady rested her hand for a moment lightly on her step-mother's shoulder.

"What could I say, little Mamma?" she asked. "It was a choice between Colonel Enderby's peace of mind and poor Bertie's reputation."

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. The monkey gave an odd, sharp cry, and ran quickly in at the open window and across the room. It looked even more grotesque and uncanny, perhaps, when it subsided into a mere animal, and went honestly on all fours, than when it stood or sat upright with an assumption of discreet and human attitudes. As the door opened, the monkey sprang nimbly off the floor into the arms of the young man who entered, making as it did so strange caressing noises.

"Poor little abomination!" said Mr. Ames, as he stroked and fondled the creature.

He came on slowly into the room, looking rather hard at Colonel Enderby meantime.

"Ah! you have arrived, then," he continued. "I have had the misfortune of missing you."

Somehow Philip did not relish being taken so entirely for granted. He would have preferred a more formal and regular mode of introduction.

"I am afraid," he said stiffly, "that I have given you a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"No, no," answered the other man. "Pray don't mention it. It didn't matter. It passed the time, you know; and that, after all, is as much as the most interesting occupation can do for one really."

Mr. Ames, judging by his appearance, was in age something over thirty. He was a good-looking young gentleman, with a dark, pale, and rather sleepy face, short pointed black beard and moustache, and black eyebrows—nearly meeting above the nose and running up a little at the ends. He was dressed with elaborate precision, in the latest English fashion; but an indescribable touch of floridness in the cut of his garments made the Colonel pretty sure an Italian tailor must be, after all, responsible for the production of them. In his button-hole Mr. Ames wore an extremely fine white gardenia.

"Give me some tea instantly, dear cousin Nell," he said, subsiding languidly into a large armchair and addressing Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. "I conclude you drove out from Genoa?" he added, looking towards Colonel Enderby.

It was observable that his voice was singularly full and sweet, while his dark eyes were nearly as mournful as those of the monkey on his knee.

The Colonel admitted, briefly, that he had driven out from Genoa.

"It is a beastly road," said Mr. Ames, very gently. "Three lumps of sugar, dear Eleanor, please; you always forget my number. And a lump for Malvolio too, please. There, there, quietly, my poor lamb! Let us avoid unnecessary violence," he went on, as the monkey snatched, chattering, at the piece of sugar she held out to it.

Philip did not stay very late at the Villa Mortelli that evening. He parted from his hostess on the terrace. Antonio, the Italian cook,—in a white linen jacket, blue trousers, and very ornate smoking-cap, with a large pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, a ferocious grey moustache, and the air of a distinguished field-marshal at least,—stood in the doorway, holding the Colonel's travelling-bag and bundle of wraps, and waiting to show him the way down to the hotel at Terzia.

The sky, in which the stars and crescent moon shone with a cold steady radiance, stretched a vast dome of purple black over land and sea. The waves lisped and murmured on the beach far below. The croaking of innumerable frogs came from the reservoir away among the vineyards. Wafts of warm air, laden with rich faint scent of orange and lemon blossom, swept round the house from the tangled garden beyond. Up at one of the villages on

the mountain side there was a *festa*, and every house was illuminated with rows of candles along each window-ledge, gleaming and twinkling, faint and yellow, through the clear air. The foreground of terrace and vineyards and roadway lay frosted with moonlight and blotted with black shadow.

"Good-night, my dear friend," said Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay.

She held the Colonel's hand in both hers, and looked at him with a strangely restless appealing expression in her fine eyes.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for coming to me. I shall expect you early to-morrow. I have so much to talk over with you. To-night I would not trouble you, but I need your help."

Eleanor checked herself abruptly. Bertie Ames sauntered out from the house and stood beside her.

"Cousin Nell," he said, in his rich, soft voice, "you and Jessie will catch all the colds in the world out here without any shawls. The night is romantic, no doubt, but, unfortunately, it is also chilly."

The girl treated Colonel Enderby to one of her brilliant smiles as she bade him good-bye.

"*Au revoir*," she said. "And the bonbons—shall I really have them?"

Looking back when he had gone half-way down the carriage road to the iron gates, Colonel Enderby could still see Mr. Ames and Jessie. They stood together, side by side, on the terrace, in the pale moonlight, a black figure and a white one. Suddenly the young girl's laugh rang out clear and sweet through the silence.

"Ah! truly our signorina is an angel," said Antonio, devoutly. "It will be a sad day for the red villa when madame marries her daughter."

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE COLONEL TAKES STOCK OF HIS POSITION.

IT appeared to Mr. Edmund Drake, who had followed his friend out from Genoa, that he waited a very long while for Colonel Enderby in the smoking-room of the Grand Hotel at Terzia that evening. The good gentleman's mind was not, it must be conceded, of the order which feeds willingly and profitably on itself. Solitude and meditation had never struck him as salutary, or in any degree inspiring. There was, indeed, nothing hermit-like about Mr. Drake's appearance; but rather a certain light and roving quality, which made him suggestive of an elderly, but still

able-bodied, butterfly. With praiseworthy diligence he was wont to flutter from amusement to amusement, killing time pertinaciously and with admirable gaiety of heart. He was a constant diner-out. He liked balls, garden parties, and festivities generally. He hunted with the Midlandshire hounds from the beginning of November till the end of March; took rooms in one of those knowing little streets off Piccadilly for June and July; found himself among the purple stretches of the Scotch moors, or by the side of some brawling salmon river, in August; paid a round of visits in pleasant country houses, with a view to shooting, in September and October; and settled down again for the serious business of the winter in his capital little bachelor establishment at Tullingworth in time for the third meet of the season, which, as everybody knows, is held at Bassett Darcy.

April and May were off-months, so to speak, with Mr. Drake. He was very grateful to any one who would suggest to him an enjoyable method of passing them; and when, this year, his old and valued friend, Philip Enderby, had proposed a run on the Continent, Mr. Drake accepted the idea with alacrity and enthusiasm. He had a pretty little taste in pictures and music of the lighter sort; and, as the home of the arts, he cherished a great kindness for Italy. It seemed to him rather clever and up to the mark to visit that profoundly picturesque country now and again. He liked to be able to say, "When I was in Rome in '57," or, "When I was on my way to Venice in '65." It sounded well, and served to impress some fair neighbour at a provincial dinner-party with the notion that she had the honour of sitting by a travelled and intelligent man of the world, who might be expected to look at life generally from a comprehensive and cosmopolitan standpoint.

And it must be owned that even now, though rotund in the central region of his person, though grey about the moustache and whiskers, though bald—yes, lamentably bald on the crown of his head, which rose white and shining, above a thick semi-circle of grizzled hair—even now Mr. Drake was penetrated with a constant desire to impress and captivate the members of the opposite sex. His vanity in this matter was deliciously *naif*. He professed a deep and searching knowledge of feminine peculiarities; and being, in point of fact, an eminently modest and well-conducted person, loved to represent himself as a terrible rake, a very Don Juan of a fellow, full of perilous dissimulation, and as inflammable as gun-cotton.

When Colonel Enderby at last entered the smoking-room that evening, Mr. Drake received him with a lively sense of satisfac-

tion. He laid down the meagre pages of *Galignani*, from which he had been vainly trying to extract some small amount of mental sustenance, with an air of evident relief and applied himself vigorously to conversation.

"Not half a bad place this," he said; "and really they gave us a first-rate dinner. They're trying to work the hotel into popularity just now, you see, it being quite new, and good feeding pays as an advertisement. There are a very tidy set of people here, too, take 'em all round. A very effective-looking Russian woman just opposite to me at table this evening—I wished I'd been nearer to her. You must observe her to-morrow, Enderby. Upon my word, she's worth looking at. The everlasting English parson here, of course—little red-haired fellow this time, with a face like a ferret. He's got his wife, and a couple of sisters-in-law—I take them to be by their looks—with him. Very plain, well-meaning sort of people, you know. The English all seem to me pretty fair. But there are half a dozen Germans—greedy, noisy, ill-dressed lot, I must say. I came over just after '66, you know, and the Germans were offensive enough then, in all conscience; but this last war has regularly brutalized them. They can't forget it, even now. Their swagger is disgusting," exclaimed Mr. Drake—"simply disgusting!"

He threw himself back on the broad orange-and-black covered divan, fitted against the wall of the room. "Brutes!" he said under his breath, and then fell to humming a gay air from *La fille de Madame Angot*, to restore his imperilled equilibrium.

Colonel Enderby, meanwhile, sat himself down in an angle of the afore-mentioned divan, which, along with a few marble-topped tables and a generous supply of mirrors and spittoons, constituted the entire furniture of the lofty light-coloured room. His sympathies being by no means strongly Gallic, he ignored the subject of his friend's discourse, and applied himself to matters nearer home.

"I'm glad you like the place," he said. "Should you mind staying on here a day longer? It seems that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay wants to talk over some business matters with me to-morrow. Probably I shan't be of the slightest use to her, but I must listen, at all events. And she insists on our both dining there to-morrow night. You won't mind, Drake, eh?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," replied the other man, cordially. "I'll poke about here in the morning, you know, and just run into Genoa in the afternoon, while you're busy."

Colonel Enderby was not in particularly good spirits. He lighted his cigar, and sat smoking in silence, staring vaguely at the well-laid *parquet* floor between his feet.

Mr. Drake, however, wanted to talk. He fidgeted with *Galignani*, hummed *Madame Angot* with increasing vivacity, and at last, no longer able to contain himself, embarked in an inquiry.

"Well, and how did you find Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay?" he asked. "I only saw her once—years ago. Good-looking woman, and promised to improve."

"I don't know that she has altogether fulfilled that promise," observed the Colonel, drily. "But as far as looks go, she's handsome enough still."

Mr. Drake fidgeted about again for a minute or so.

"Well, and what about the little girl?" he inquired lightly.

"Oh, she's grown up as little girls will."

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty," said Philip, with a certain finality in his tone.

Few things are more vexing to your thorough-paced gossip than to be answered in this poverty-stricken sort of fashion. But Edmund Drake was not easily put off; he returned valiantly to the charge.

"Anybody else there?" he asked, after a time.

Colonel Enderby raised his eyes with a questioning expression.

"There—where?" he said. "Oh! at the Villa Mortelli? Yes, a nice, gentle, little person in grey, who put in an appearance at dinner—*dame de compagnie*, I suppose; and an infernally ugly monkey; and a cousin of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's—a young man." The Colonel leant back and crossed his legs. "I didn't quite fancy the young man somehow," he added presently.

"Ah! one rarely does fancy the young man, you know, when one's getting well on towards fifty," remarked Mr. Drake, with a chuckle. "Well, I shall turn in now, I think, Enderby; and I strongly recommend you to do the same. Nothing like a good night's rest for bringing one round after a long journey, you know."

Philip, however, did not take the excellent advice thus offered him. He sat up rather late.

More than once Galli, the head waiter, clothed in funereal black, with a napkin over his arm, and flat, tired, slippered feet, looked in to see if the English Colonel had not at last retired, so that he might put out the gas and go to bed himself. Galli had a noble head and pale, finely chiselled face, set in a frame of crisp black beard and crisp black hair, suggestive of some impassive and world-weary Roman emperor. In point of fact, his soul was more in harmony with his slippered feet than with his imperial head. It was a common, patient, unimportant little soul, quite capable of thrilling into ecstasy over a tip of five francs. The mark of a stupendous history and civilization has stamped itself

in royal characters on so many Italian faces, behind which there really is nothing at all, except slightly amiable vacuity. Galli looked in at the smoking-room door, saw Colonel Enderby was still there, and went humbly away again, to meditate in silence and loneliness among his table-cloths, glasses, and decanters.

Philip sat and smoked and thought, or rather ruminated; for when men of the Colonel's type are not actively engaged about some practical matter, they can hardly be said to think. Their mental processes are chiefly pictorial, I fancy; not so much a matter of words and ideas, as of scenes and impressions.

The gas burned with a yellow, unsteady light, revealing very fully the nakedness of the room. In the corridor just beyond, Mr. Drake's enemies, the lively, not to say uproarious, party of Teutons were playing cards, and indulging freely in those strange interjectional snortings and gruntings that form such an integral part of German conversation.

His surroundings were far from romantic; and yet the pictures which presented themselves to Philip Enderby's mind were undoubtedly touched with the delightful finger of romance. The events of the afternoon had stimulated his memory to a remarkable degree. He seemed to see poor, good-looking, rackety Beau Pierce-Dawnay once more, as he lay tossing restlessly on his narrow camp bed, through the long hours of semi-tropic nights—half wild with fever and exhaustion, crying tears of impotent misery and weakness, and raving about his young wife and his "darling little Jessie," whom he would never see again. Philip had been with poor Beau when he died, and had promised—with the fervour natural to such a moment—to look after the dying man's wife and child. He had kept his promise, too, with perhaps unusual faithfulness—for that same fervour of the watcher beside the death-bed, cools down sensibly, as a rule, after the funeral: and what was originally embraced as a sacred duty, appears too often, later, as something allied to a bore. But Philip had really applied his mind to helping his friend's widow. He had extracted her jointure from a recalcitrant father-in-law; had advised her successfully regarding her affairs on several occasions—Eleanor had rather a gift for getting into what are vulgarly called tight places—and had held himself ready, at all times, to come to her if she should send for him. For the last few years their relation had been a less intimate one, it is true; yet the Colonel had never regarded himself as released from his old engagement.

The Germans finished their game. They got up with a sound of loud talk and laughter, a scraping of chairs and clatter of boot-heels on the marble floor. Galli looked in for a moment, tired,

but acquiescent in whatever state of things might be revealed to him. But Philip Enderby sat still on the orange-and-black divan, his legs crossed, his steady blue eyes staring at nothing in particular, a queer smile about his lips, and the stump of his cigar fading from crimson heat to grey ash between his fingers.

A fair young face smiled at him from under a great red umbrella, and a light slender figure flitted before him in the gloom of a wide dusky stairway, and merry mocking words wandered in through a sunny window. A hundred dainty little movements and charming glances forced themselves on his remembrance; and all the while, with ancient wizened countenance, a monkey grinned and chattered at him; and a young man —well, no, not a young man exactly, but a decidedly younger man than Colonel Enderby—stood by, mournful, cynical, and it must be owned, most unnecessarily good-looking into the bargain.

The Colonel sat up and shook himself. He did not half like his own imaginations. His state of mind was decidedly abnormal, and it worried him. Then his thoughts wandered back to Cecilia Murray, his old love. Yes, he had been true to her, very true, on the whole,—even when it was quite useless to be so. A certain tenderness came over him even now whenever he thought of her. Ah! how different things might have been if he had married her years ago, and if, in due time, Bassett Darcy had come to him!

Philip had visions of himself, solidly prosperous, settled in life, with a wife who had become a sort of second self to him, and a troop of growing boys and girls around him; hunting three or four times a week; riding over on Board days to Slowby; going to church soberly on Sunday; busy with pleasant homely matters; building good cottages; giving away beef and pudding to the labourers' wives at Christmas; wandering about on nice, dull, dewy mornings, with a spud in his hand, and vexing seriously because there were so many plantains in the turf on the lawns. He sighed. Yes, notwithstanding his assertions made to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay a few hours before, *that* was the life he was really cut out for—ordinary, sensible, and responsible, touched with kindly humour, and backed with dignified comfort. Renunciation is not such an easy matter, after all. You may fast of your own free will, and not because you are compelled to; but you will feel as hungry for the food you deny yourself as for food that is denied you. Colonel Enderby had forgiven his father, he harboured no grudge against his younger brother; but he was not very cheerful all the same. He got up and took one or two turns up and down the room. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he stood still in front of one of the mirrors, and took a good, long, honest look at himself.

The impression he received was not an encouraging one, somehow.

"Drake was right," he said, a little inconsequently. "I'm nearly fifty. It's all very well, but there are a number of things you must do before then if you're going to do them at all. I feel as if a little fighting would be rather a comfort just now," he added.

The Colonel moved across to the table again, and picked up his cigar-case and box of fusees.

"I'd better go to bed. I'm out of sorts, I think, to-night. The day after to-morrow we'll go on to Spezia; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay will have said her say by then, I suppose."

Just outside the door he nearly ran into Galli—yawning, but mild, and still clinging to his napkin. Philip Enderby was struck with sudden compunction; he said a few civil words to the man about having kept him up so late.

Galli bowed and smiled faintly—a well-bred, if discrowned Cæsar.

"We are accustomed," he remarked vaguely. "The German gentlemen have but lately finished. I wait to see to the gas."

And with shuffling footsteps he passed along into the empty smoking-room.

CHAPTER IV.

"LE DESSOUS DES CARTES."

FOR reasons which he would have found it difficult to define, Philip put off his visit to the Villa Mortelli, next day, till the afternoon. He did his best to maintain a very British and unimpressible frame of mind. Accompanied by that lively and self-important little man, Mr. Drake, he explored the not very promising town of Terzia in the morning; looked in at the lofty, stuffy, painted church, and pronounced it tawdry; lingered for a few minutes at the great straggling station, and remarked, with a grain of contempt, how slovenly and slipshod all Italian railroad arrangements appeared to be; loitered down on the grey beach, in the brilliant sunshine, watching the great blue-green rollers come in in endless succession, and break in hollow thunder and snowy foam at his feet, and declared he had seen a ten-times finer ground sea on the west coast of England. The Colonel was sensible of a strong instinct of self-protection at this juncture. He felt the desirability of cultivating a number of wholesome British pre-

judices. The feeling amused him, even while he recognized its wisdom.

About half-past two o'clock he arrived at the little red villa. The sky was absolutely clear, and the whole place seemed to sleep in the rich glowing sunshine. The front door stood open on to the terrace. Philip rang; waited; rang again, and then, getting bored both with the delay and the heat, went indoors and upstairs.

The drawing-room door stood open too. From within came the sound of a piano. Some one was playing brilliantly, almost riotously, a valse. There is an indescribable underlying pathos in dance music—everybody knows it; a heartache behind all the laughter, a weariness below all the rapid movement, a question, a doubt, a misgiving, under all the radiance and joy.

Colonel Enderby did not quite care to acknowledge the penetrating sentiment of the music just then. He knocked at the door, as no servant was visible, and then walked straight into the room. As he did so, the valse sank away into a tender regretful passage.

Jessie Pierce-Dawnay was at the piano. Apparently she was absorbed in her own performance. Her pretty head was thrown back, and her light figure showed up with a very telling distinctness against the shaded corner of the room beyond the instrument. In a low chair by her side Mr. Ames lounged, slowly cutting the pages of a yellow French novel, and whistling the air of the valse softly as he did so. At the sound of Colonel Enderby's footsteps, he looked up.

"Ah!" he said gently.

The young girl looked round too. She got up quickly and came forward, her face irradiated with one of those delightful smiles.

"You are very late," she said. "Did you get tired of us all last night? We expected you to luncheon at half-past twelve; but perhaps you did well in not coming. You would have found Bertie and me alone. Miss Keat has gone into Genoa; Mamma has one of her headaches, and is invisible."

Mr. Ames, meanwhile, rose slowly from his chair.

"I hope they gave you decent rooms," he observed, in his sweet, drawling voice. "I spoke beforehand; I did what I could; I was assured that you would be treated *en prince*. But a hotel-keeper's business is to tell one lies, you know."

"I did very well, thanks," Colonel Enderby answered, rather shortly. Then he turned to Jessie again, and made one or two necessary and civil inquiries respecting her stepmother.

"Ah! Mamma's headaches are very distressing," she said. "They are nervous. When they come on, Mamma succumbs; she disappears entirely. As for us, we are very sorry, of course, but we have grown accustomed to it; we wait till she reappears, and then we proceed as usual. Bertie suffers at times, too," she added; "but he doesn't disappear. He remains, and I have to amuse him."

"In that case Mr. Ames is hardly deserving of much pity," said Philip.

The young lady was really very captivating as she stood there looking with a sort of mischievous innocence from one of her companions to the other.

"I am to be pitied, though, a good deal, sometimes," she answered. "Bertie is not easy to entertain. He becomes tired of everything. He says he has got beyond it. He has a most beautiful voice, Colonel Enderby, but he will never sing now; he says he has got beyond that. The phrase is odious to me."

The girl spoke with some warmth. Mr. Ames went on quietly cutting the pages of his novel.

"My dear little cousin," he said, "your experience of life is as yet, happily for you, very limited. I will preach you a little sermon."

"Oh, pray don't," said Jessie, quickly, putting up her eyebrows. "I have the most lively objection to sermons."

"I know," he answered. "For an English girl your education has been deplorably neglected in that particular. But if you knew more of the world, you would be vividly aware that the chief business of a reasonable being consists in getting beyond things. Ask Colonel Enderby," he added, glancing up suddenly, "if he is not unpleasantly conscious of having got beyond a whole number of things by now."

"Have you?" said Jessie, almost seriously.

The whole spirit of the conversation was distasteful to Philip. He had taken a dislike to Mr. Ames, who struck him as sententious, and at moments even offensive, with his languor, and his drawl, and his over-delicate manner. The question, too, reminded him, with irritating distinctness, of his unsatisfactory colloquy with the looking-glass in the smoking-room the night before. He paused a moment before answering. The girl repeated her question, looking in his face all the while with curious directness.

"Yes," he said, rather sadly; "I'm afraid I have got beyond a good many things too, Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

"Ah! dear me," she sighed; "what a pity!"

Still she stood gazing questioningly at him. The Colonel felt himself singularly moved by that lingering inspection.

Bertie Ames laughed gently.

"I told you so, Jessie," he said. "The law is of universal application. See, it holds equally good in the case of myself and Colonel Enderby—if I may venture, in passing, to associate my obscure name with his illustrious one. Everybody gets beyond everything, to put it vulgarly. I am almost past this last novel of Daudet's. And the day will come, Jessie, when a new gown—even one from Paris—will cease to give you any very active satisfaction."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl, piteously. Her pretty eyes filled with tears, and she moved two or three steps away from him, and nearer to the Colonel.

"Don't say that—don't spoil it all! It isn't true, Bertie," she cried. "Say it isn't true," she went on, turning to Colonel Enderby—coming so close to him that he perceived quite strongly the scent of a little bunch of grey violets which she wore in the bosom of her dress—"tell me it isn't true; tell me I shall always go on enjoying things. I enjoy them so much now. Don't let Bertie make me miserable."

At this moment Philip stood undoubtedly in need of all those self-protective instincts which he had sought to cultivate earlier in the day. The situation was a slightly dangerous one. For an instant he was tempted to do an exquisitely silly thing. He was tempted to gather this pretty appealing child into his strong arms and swear—an oath, by the way, quite impossible to keep—that neither Mr. Bertie Ames nor any one else should ever give her a moment's distress again. Fortunately, however, most people only do a tithe of the foolish things they are tempted to do. Colonel Enderby drew himself up. He even moved a little farther away. His heart may have beat rather quick for the moment, but that he could not prevent. He glanced at Bertie, who leant easily on the top of the piano, and watched him with a suspicion of lurking amusement in the expression of his handsome face.

"My dear young lady," he said quietly, "if people get discontented and miserable, they have generally only themselves to thank for it, in the long run. One need never, except through one's own fault, get beyond enjoying the things which are really worth most in life."

There was a pause after the Colonel had thus made his confession of faith. Then Mr. Ames observed, but so mildly and amiably that it was impossible to be very wrath with him—

"Pardon me, but I wonder whether you really believe that?"

Just at this moment Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay rustled into the room,

closely followed by the austere form of Parker, bearing cushions, eau-de-cologne, and various et ceteras.

"Ah, Colonel Enderby," she said, with a certain weariness of manner which was not without its charm, "I have been expecting you. Why didn't you come earlier?"

As she spoke Eleanor looked rather hard at the Colonel, erect, serious—even a trifle savage; at the young girl, with her flushed face and still misty eyes; and, lastly, at Bertie Ames, leaning indolently on the top of the piano. Her expression changed sensibly, and she spoke perhaps with a grain of uncalled-for rapidity and decision.

"Parker, you may take all those things back into the little drawing-room again, please. I am not very well to-day, not equal to much," she continued, addressing Philip; "still, I cannot afford to waste the precious hours of your visit. I should like to have some quiet talk with you, Colonel Enderby. Will you come with me into my sanctum? It is cooler there, and we shall be alone."

Then she placed her hand on her step-daughter's shoulder and said, "You look tired, Jessie. Take a book, and go to your own room and rest."

"And me?" inquired Mr. Ames, gently, "and me, cousin Nell? In your scheme of universal benevolence, am I to be left out in the cold, or will you kindly devise a suitable occupation for me also?"

Eleanor turned to him with a flash in her eyes.

"You can ring for the monkey," she said briefly.

"Ah, just so. The idea is an admirable one. I too am provided for. Thanks. I may ring for the monkey."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked at Philip. "Let us come," she said, as she moved towards the door.

The Colonel followed her across the landing to another room, though inwardly he was just a shade reluctant to do so. He liked plain sailing, a simple straightforward manner of conducting life; and he began to suspect that plain sailing was by no means the custom of this slightly eccentric household. He was becoming conscious that a good deal was going on around him which he could not fathom, and he did not in the least enjoy it.

When Mr. Ames was alone, he subsided into the deep arm-chair again.

"Cousin Nell becomes enigmatical," he said, half aloud.

If Philip Enderby was already on the look-out for cross currents, and sunken rocks, and shifting winds, his talk with his hostess that afternoon was by no means calculated to reassure him.

The preparations for it in the way of smelling-bottles and cushions were alone suggestive of embarrassing possibilities, to a man unused to the habits and requirements of womankind. Then, too, an effect of restlessness, of hardly repressed emotion, which was observable in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's manner, perplexed him. In a way, he was a little afraid of this stormy handsome woman in her present mood. She struck him as likely to make strange propositions, and prove somewhat unmanageable if they were not complied with. Mentally, he repeated his decision of leaving Terzia on the morrow.

After some desultory conversation as to his plans—where he was going, and what he proposed to see—Eleanor said, with a certain solemnity in her tone—

"Colonel Enderby, you mustn't suppose I asked you to put yourself out of the way and come here to see me on some merely frivolous pretext. I want you to be so good as to give me your advice in a difficult and delicate matter. There are reasons which seem to give you a claim in this question. You were my husband's best friend, and so, in this case, I instinctively turn to you. Will you permit me to speak quite freely?"

The Colonel assented courteously enough. What else could he do? Yet he was sensible of growing discomfort. The room was cool, but the shut and darkened windows produced an effect of airlessness. It was sweet, too, with the scent of flowers, and his hostess, with her serious intense face, sitting on the old-fashioned sofa opposite to him, made a sufficiently telling and graceful picture. But Philip refused to be impressed. Perhaps he was suffering a reaction after his moment of keen feeling in the drawing-room just before. He was not in quite a sympathetic attitude of mind, and yet his loyalty to his old brother-in-arms made him wish to be helpful to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay if he could.

"I have great confidence in your judgment," she went on. "I cannot trust myself; I can't be as dispassionate as I want to be. But I can trust you, Colonel Enderby. Think of all I owe you, as it is."

"Pray don't say that," he interrupted. "Your husband was my very dear friend. I have merely tried to pay—very inadequately—a debt I owed to the dead——"

The Colonel paused. His expression was pathetic, modest, charming, as he looked across at her.

Eleanor was a person of quick perceptions. She had a very high respect for her companion. She felt, too, at this moment, that a dividing wall was, so to speak, broken down between them, and that they had moved several steps nearer to each other in intimacy.

"I know, I know," she returned warmly; "and it gives me more confidence now. I am horribly perplexed. You must advise me. Tell me," she went on, speaking quickly, "tell me, what shall I do with my step-daughter, with poor Beaumont's child?"

Philip Enderby was startled.

"Good heavens! Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, what do you mean?"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," she answered. "I don't mean anything very extraordinary. Jessie has reached an age when it becomes necessary to think of her future. She is attractive, she has had many admirers."

"No doubt," murmured Philip, almost involuntarily.

"Foreign ways are different to English ones, you know. Parents here take a much more active interest in their children's prospects than is customary at home. They look forward. They consult with some chosen friend; they decide on a course of action, and carry it out."

The Colonel began to see what was coming. Under other circumstances the position he was called upon so unexpectedly to occupy might have struck him as an amusing one. But for some reason he was not in the least inclined to look at the question of Jessie's future from a humorous point of view. He was moved to disclaim, quite hotly, any share in providing for the young lady's happiness.

"You must pardon me," he said. "In all business matters I am glad to be of service to you in any way I can; but this question is altogether outside the range of my capacity. I have not any qualifications for the part of adviser regarding your step-daughter's future. Remember, I had not seen her since she was quite a child till yesterday. I know absolutely nothing of her tastes and inclinations; any interference on my part would be simply grotesque."

Philip leant back stiffly in his chair, and looked away.

"I am sorry, but I must refuse to discuss this matter," he continued. "It places me altogether in a false position. Surely some one else—your cousin, Mr. Ames, for instance—is far better qualified to advise you than I am."

Directly the words were out of his mouth, Philip regretted them. It was odious to him to think of that languid disillusioned young man having a hand in the fate of the pretty child who had implored him so passionately "not to let Bertie make her miserable" only half an hour ago. The Colonel felt as if he had been guilty of an act of treachery. He was furious with himself.

His hostess, too, was perhaps a trifle nettled at his very plain

refusal to do what she asked of him; but outwardly she dominated her displeasure.

"I understand your feeling," she said. "I half expected you would object at first, and I respect you for doing so. But we can't let the conversation end like this. I must explain myself a little further. At the risk of annoying you, I shall go on."

Eleanor sat up; she leant her elbow on the arm of the sofa, and fingered the carved woodwork of it rather restlessly as she spoke.

"In mentioning Mr. Ames you have touched the root of all my perplexities. He is my second cousin. He has been living with us, off and on, for the last two years. Bertie's career has not been an altogether fortunate one. He has had a good deal to endure, one way and another. I think," she added, with a ring of genuine feeling in her voice, "that I have been of some little help to poor Bertie. Colonel Enderby, you must bear with me; you must let me tell you about him."

But the Colonel was growing decidedly restive. He was suspicious of these confidences; he began to distrust whither they might lead. He wanted to cut the conversation short, to go away, to go out of doors—to do anything, in short, but sit here listening in this sweet, airless, oppressive atmosphere.

"You are tired, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said, getting up and standing before her. "Don't you think it would be best to leave the story of Mr. Ames' troubles till to-morrow morning—till you are rested?"

"You would do me a real favour, Colonel Enderby, if you would listen now."

She turned her face to him suddenly; it seemed pale and haggard in the soft light.

"Pray, pray, listen now," she went on, speaking low and hurriedly, clasping her hands, and leaning forward with her eyes fixed on his face. "You are honest and true, and I am horribly lonely; I am in great distress. I can't tell you altogether why; you must take my word partly on trust. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken so soon, but I am low and nervous to-day. I hate all that pitiless sunshine, and glare, and glitter outside; it distracts me. I am getting worn out, and I can't be cautious and diplomatic any longer. I have wanted some one to speak to for weeks and months. Of course, all this seems weak, excited, ridiculous, exaggerated to you; but listen to me, Colonel Enderby, not for my sake, but for the sake of my dead husband, who trusted you—for his sake, hear me out."

The Colonel sat down again. It was all very painful, very

unpleasant; but it would be nothing short of brutal to leave a woman pleading for a hearing in that desperate way, and Philip was very far from being a brute.

"Thank you," she said eagerly.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay pressed her handkerchief hard against her lips; she was altogether unstrung. She had a choking sensation in her throat, and, for a few seconds, was on the edge of an outburst of hysterical sobbing; but she mastered herself by an effort of will, which her companion could not help admiring. She set her teeth, gave herself a petulant little shake, and then began speaking again calmly.

"Bertie's mother was an Italian," she said. "His father was a banker in Milan. I used to be with them a good deal, years ago, before I married. However, that's neither here nor there. Bertie has money and no profession. He fell wildly in love with a young Italian lady of good family—a distant connection of his mother's. Her parents had other views for their daughter; they would not hear of it. Bertie was not good enough for them, I suppose; they made his religion the objection. It has always struck me as, indeed, a case of the irony of fate, that poor dear Bertie, of all people in the world, should suffer in the cause of religion."

Eleanor shifted her position slightly; she avoided looking at Colonel Enderby.

"The young lady married, as her parents desired her; she did not pretend to care a rap for her husband. She was a beautiful, self-willed, emotional creature. I needn't go into particulars; the story is not a pleasant one. Everybody knew what was happening. Bertie Ames sacrificed his youth to this unfortunate *liaison;* it has blighted his whole life. The lady still cares for him—there have been terrible scenes at times—but he no longer cares, I think, for her. Yet, if her husband were to die, he would marry her to-morrow; he believes he is bound in honour to do so. Bertie's sense of honour is very fine."

Eleanor raised her eyes with a movement of pride as she finished speaking. For the life of him, Philip could not help smiling a little.

"Yes, it is," she cried, with energy. "He no longer cares, but he waits. He will not think of any one else. All his Italian friends laud him as a *preux chevalier*, a very model of constancy."

She paused, still looking up, almost defiantly. Colonel Enderby cleared his throat. He had disliked this young gentleman from the first; and that fact, probably, made him somewhat merciless. Personal feelings insinuate themselves so cunningly

into our judgments of others, and offer, on broad, general principles, such excellent justifications for their existence.

"That is a mistake on the part of Mr. Ames' friends," he remarked drily.

A dull flush came into Eleanor's cheeks.

"Yes, from your point of view, I dare say it is; yet, remember, Bertie is more of an Italian than an Englishman. The standards in these matters are different here. But for the last few months I have been growing dreadfully anxious. I have noticed, I have feared that—well, that he was very much drawn towards Jessie. He won't marry, he will never marry any woman but the Countess Tolomei. But, Colonel Enderby, think—think if Jessie comes to care for him."

Colonel Enderby stood up all of a piece, as the saying is.

"Send him away," he said, fiercely. "There is just that one thing to do; send him out of the house directly."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flung back her hands wildly.

"I can't, I can't!" she cried. "Anything in the world but that."

Philip stared at her for a moment in dumb amazement. She was pale and scared.

Then as the meaning of her strange outburst began to dawn upon him, he turned away, half in pity, half with a sense of repulsion. The situation was painfully complicated.

Eleanor also had risen to her feet. There was a silence. Presently she spoke.

"I have been mad," she said hoarsely. "I have lost my head and betrayed myself. I have put myself to shame before you. Colonel Enderby, if you are a man of honour—and I know you are that—you will believe what I say now, and then go away and blot my insane self-betrayal out of your mind for ever. Bertie Ames does not dream of this; nobody in the world knows it."

There was a fine dignity about the woman at that moment.

Philip bowed silently. Words were obviously out of the question. Eleanor moved aside, and began nervously arranging some cut flowers that stood on a dish on one of the tables.

The Colonel's mind was penetrated with the remembrance of Jessie. Poor child! her prospects, all things considered, seemed to him sufficiently melancholy. Again, he felt a strong movement of pity—of tenderness towards her. It seemed frightful that this pure, innocent, gay young life should be bound up with the dark unfruitful history he had just been listening to. He stood absorbed in thought. If only something could be done to help her!

Eleanor left off fingering the flowers, and moved about the room impatiently. With whatever sentiments of trust and confidence, with whatever vague hope of possible assistance she had begun her interview with Colonel Enderby, at this moment, in her hot shame and wounded pride, she desired most cordially to be rid of him.

"You leave here to-morrow I think you said?" she observed at last, over her shoulder.

Philip was not prepared for the question. It forced him to come to a sudden decision.

"No," he answered slowly; "I think I shall remain here for a few days longer—that is, of course, if you will permit me to do so."

There was a perceptible interval of silence before Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's answer came.

"It will be delightful," she said at last. "Shall we come into the other room? Miss Keat and the others will be there. It seems to me rather oppressive here."

"Thank you, I think I won't stay now," he responded; "I rather want a walk. I'll come back, with my friend Drake, to dinner."

As the two friends were going down to the hotel that night, Mr. Drake suddenly stopped short in the wavering yellow light of one of the few gas-lamps in the quaint, painted main street of Terzia, and looked full at his companion.

"I don't half like leaving you behind, somehow, Enderby," he said. "It's not merely the breaking up of our plans; though, of course, I'm sorry for that: but I take for granted your reasons for staying are good enough, and so I accept them without any fuss."

The good little gentleman moved on again with his quick, self-important walk.

"I don't know what it is, but, hang it all, Enderby, I feel nervous about you."

Philip laughed in a very cheery, reassuring away.

"You have a wonderful imagination, Drake," he said. "Why, what on earth do you take it is going to happen to me?"

"I don't mind the widow," observed the other man, apparently rather inconsequently; "I'd trust her, I think. At bottom she's a good woman—flighty, of course, and all that sort of thing; but I'll back her to be sound enough here"—Mr. Drake thumped himself heavily in the region of the heart—"sound enough here, you know," he repeated. "But that little girl—upon my word, Enderby, somehow I fight uncommonly shy of that deucedly pretty little girl."

The Colonel looked down; he kicked the loose gravel on the walk of the hotel garden—which they were just then crossing—with his foot, and laughed again, but this time with slight annoyance.

"A thousand to one," he said, "you'll never set eyes on Miss Pierce-Dawnay again, so really I don't think that very much matters."

CHAPTER V.

JESSIE SUGGESTS A REMEDY.

HAVING once committed himself to a line of action, it was Colonel Enderby's habit to stand by it, even when it failed, on more mature consideration, to commend itself very highly to his judgment. Inspired partly by his loyalty to Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay's memory, partly by a quick pity for the two women, whose position seemed to him such a critical and painful one, Philip had decided the evening before to stay on at Terzia. He was going to stick to his post; he was going somehow to see them through. And yet, when in the cheerless light of a very wet morning, he bade farewell to kind, fussy little Mr. Drake, and saw the latter gentleman pack himself and his baggage into the rattling omnibus, which was to convey him into Genoa, Philip became conscious that perhaps he had undertaken a very foolish piece of business. It was all very well to talk of lines of action; but the unfortunate thing was, that he hadn't any line at all. He could not see his way in the least. He turned back into the large brightly painted hotel, which looked particularly frivolous and ephemeral on this gloomy morning, in anything but a sweet temper. He said to himself that "the whole thing was a nuisance, and that he had got himself into an infernally awkward fix:—" and, it must be owned, he said it with a will.

The Colonel's temper was not improved when, on sallying forth, some few hours later, in a mackintosh and heavy boots in defiance of the streaming rain, he met Mr. Ames just turning in at the gates of the hotel garden. Bertie was holding up a large umbrella, picking his way carefully along the sloppy pavement, and looking mildly disgusted, yet resigned. He had on a very light overcoat, and wore the inevitable white gardenia in his button-hole, a trifle brown at the edge of the petals from the wet.

He nodded blandly to Colonel Enderby.

"I suppose you rather like this sort of weather? It seems

home-like," he observed, with a sweet wistfulness of expression, which was by no means appeasing to a man in an irritable frame of mind.

Two minutes before Philip had felt no special objection to the rain. The dull sky was really rather a relief after all that gaudy sunlight. But for some occult reason, as Bertie spoke, his opinion went round to another quarter with all the velocity of a weather-cock on a gusty day.

"It's the most beastly morning I ever saw," he replied, with considerable asperity. "The whole place looks miserable. It seems to me this country can only look decent in a blaze of sunshine."

Mr. Ames smiled faintly.

"Yes, I understand just what you mean."

He took a leisurely survey of the large hotel, built round three sides of a square and coloured pink, with splendid imitations of stone pilasters and florid mouldings painted in pale yellow, and the shadows they were fondly supposed to cast painted in pale green. Then he turned, and gazed down the many-coloured street behind him.

"I understand perfectly what you mean," he repeated. "It looks very like the inside of a theatre by daylight. You thorough-going English people dislike that; it strikes you as artificial. As for us, we others prefer our theatre, daylight or gaslight, to anything else in the world."

"It all appears to me very cheap and flimsy," said Colonel Enderby. "I can't think much of the beauty of a country when it can be spoilt by a few hours' rain."

He glanced critically at the other man's clothes as he spoke. Mr. Ames' dress provoked him. To-day Philip took great exception at his hat. It was too low in the crown, and too curled up at the sides. "Just like a shop-boy out for a Sunday," he said to himself.

"As we have satisfactorily disposed of the country, let us go on to the people," Bertie resumed, with much composure. He found a delicate pleasure in keeping his companion standing here in the rain. "They remind me, now, very much of fowls on a wet day, depressed and draggled. I felt so like a fowl myself this morning, that I really had to come out. I wanted to stand about on one leg with other fowls, and make melancholy little noises. There is a natural desire for communion among the wretched, you know. I feel much better since I have stood about here with you."

This was going too far. The Colonel drew himself up.

"I think I'll walk on," he said curtly, and, turning away, passed rapidly down the dripping street.

"He is a very good-hearted barbarian, after all, I believe, though he doesn't like me," Bertie Ames said to himself, with commendable candour, as he picked his way across the hotel garden. "The British flavour is a little too pronounced, perhaps; but, poor man, he can't help that. I wonder what dear Cousin Nell really intends to do with him. Her inventive power is startling at moments."

Later that same day, Philip Enderby had a short conversation with Jessie, which seemed to throw light on the situation. The rain had almost ceased; but the pale ragged clouds still hung low on the hillsides, while the whole landscape seemed blotted in in cold tones of indigo and grey. The Colonel had been for a long walk. He had been trying hard to arrange his ideas, to make out what was the next step he had better take. To stay and do nothing to mend matters at the red villa was out of the question, and yet for the life of him he could not arrive at any distinct conclusion. All his plans had been put out; and he found himself stranded in a dull little foreign town, offering but small promise of occupation or entertainment to a man of his tastes, with a difficult and delicate piece of diplomacy on his hands. The Colonel felt himself to be a somewhat ill-used person, as he walked up to the front door of the Villa Mortelli that gloomy drizzling spring afternoon.

Just as he was going to ring he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Jessie coming from the tangled garden beyond. She was wrapped in a long cloak, with the hood of it pulled up over her head, framing the oval of her fair young face with a dark line. There was something pensive in her expression. The girl had gained an almost tragic interest in Colonel Enderby's eyes since his conversation with her step-mother. Her foes were those of her own household, poor child! It was sad. Altogether, she struck him as a very appealing little figure, standing there among the dripping leaves and rain-washed flowers in the dull afternoon light.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "It has been a horrible day. Miss Keat has had bad news from England; she is going away to-morrow. To-day she has done nothing but pack and cry. Mamma has devoted herself to Miss Keat. Bertie went out early—he escaped. That is the disadvantage of being a girl; you cannot escape; you must stay."

Jessie delivered herself of this statement of her small woes, looking with pathetic frankness into Philip's face.

"I am wretched," she went on, turning away, and pulling impatiently at a straggling rose-spray, which, as she touched it, sent a tiny cataract of water on to the shining gravel below. "I want the sunshine; I want to be amused."

At the risk of lowering the Colonel lamentably in the opinion of all sensible readers, I must admit that Jessie's petulant outburst, far from seeming silly or reprehensible in his eyes, touched him considerably. Unfortunately, you see, Philip was not the hero of an admirable middle-class fiction—a person bristling with respectabilities and moralities, whose life is ruled by common sense, and a lively discernment of probable profit and loss, and of the market value of a given article. He was only a plain, simple-minded gentleman, with a very tender heart under his stern manner, and a vein of poetry and romance in his composition which, at moments, sadly perverted the strictness of his judgment. Alas! there will always be men, I fear, in this singularly ill-regulated world, who never find a graceful girl more winning than when she laments that there are creases in her rose-leaves, or sheds charming little pearl-like tears of desire for the moon or some other equally unattainable object.

"I am very sorry you are wretched," he answered gently. "It hardly seems fair, does it? Wretchedness might keep itself for older and"—he hesitated a moment, rather at a loss for the right word—"well, different sort of people to you. It does not seem quite appropriate at your age. But I am afraid I cannot bring back the sunshine for you."

Philip paused. He would have given a good deal to bring back the sunshine for this pretty child, in more senses than the immediate and obvious one. He felt rather fiercely towards Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay at that moment. He formulated an accusation against her. She wanted to get rid of the girl to serve her own purposes. It was unfaithful of her. In thought he accused her of being a dangerous and unscrupulous woman.

Jessie looked up at him with charming directness.

"I don't know that," she said. "I believe you would do what you could. I like you very much, Colonel Enderby."

Philip, like many light-haired men, retained even at eight-and-forty a certain capacity for blushing. There was undoubtedly a deeper tone than usual in his face, as he answered—

"As much as in the days of dolls and bonbons?"

"Quite as much," said Jessie, promptly.

She drew the dark cloak more closely about her shoulders.

"Do you mind walking with me a little way?" she asked, after a moment's hesitation. "It is so cold standing still."

The Colonel did not mind it in the least. He was very much interested in Miss Pierce-Dawnay and in her future. He did not attempt to conceal that fact from himself. Why should he? Her father had been his friend. Philip had refused rather hotly, it is true, to co-operate actively with her step-mother the day before; but then, that was before all the facts of the case were before him. No man is quite consistent; even the most honest-minded among us can find excellent reasons for following our own inclinations.

Anyhow, it happened that on that damp and sombre afternoon Colonel Enderby had a little walk with the young lady, which tended to make him entertain a much more amiable opinion of Terzia and its surroundings.

"I thought the other day I should like to talk to you," she had said, when they were fairly started on the road leading down through the vineyards. "I want to ask you several things. I think you have influence with Mamma; perhaps you could speak to her. It is so dull here; I want to go away. Mamma says she requires retirement; but I don't in the least require retirement. I was much happier at Florence. We went into society at Florence. And Bertie was nicer at Florence. He has been strange lately. He says all sorts of depressing things. He is very melancholy. He sits and stares at me."

A sense of relief came over Philip. He could not have said precisely why.

"Do you mind very much being stared at?" he inquired, looking at the girl by his side, and smiling.

"It is very creepy to be stared at by somebody who looks dismal and does not speak," she answered quickly. "Bertie is fond of reading scientific books about the origin of all sorts of things. He firmly believes that we are all descended from monkeys. I am inclined to think it must be true too, sometimes; for his eyes are exactly like Malvolio's, when he sits and stares, and says nothing. It is not pleasant."

The girl gave a little shudder, and then went on speaking again, with that peculiarly distinct and clear-cut utterance.

"I wish Mamma would go back to England. She says it is too expensive, and that the climate does not suit her. But I want to see it. English girls have so much more liberty; they have so many amusements. I should like England."

Colonel Enderby stopped. This struck him as rather a happy idea. Jessie stopped too, and turned to him. They were standing beneath one of the crooked dwarfed fir trees bordering the carriage-road, about halfway down to the iron gates.

"Ah! you want to go to England?" he said briefly.

"Yes; I want immensely to go. We could settle down and really know people. Here everybody whom we know goes away, sooner or later. Only Bertie, and Mamma, and I remain."

"You want me to ask Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay to take you home to England?" said Philip.

"Ah, do, do!" cried the girl, softly, but fervently.

She clasped her pretty white hands in an imploring manner, while her long cloak, flying back in a sudden gust of wind, revealed her slim, graceful figure. Colonel Enderby's heart warmed sensibly towards this charming young lady. She confided in him with such engaging frankness. He felt more at home with her too, out of doors in the gloom and wet, than in the lofty rooms and amid the faded elegancies of the little red villa.

"I'll talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said, after a moment's reflection. "I believe it would be an excellent plan. I dare say I could be of some use to you—find you rooms, you know, and that sort of thing. Then you might have a couple of months in London during the season, and come down into Midlandshire afterwards. Your father," he added gently, "was a Midlandshire man; you would like to see his county, wouldn't you?"

Whether it was the prospect of seeing poor Beau Pierce-Dawnay's native county, or whether other and less retrospective enjoyments floated before Jessie's eyes, I cannot say; but she certainly smiled upon her companion with a brilliant and delighted smile.

"Ah! I knew you would help me," she said.

"Meanwhile," Philip went on, "we must try to make things a little more cheerful for you here. Let me see, to-day's Thursday. Suppose you and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay come and dine with me at the Grand Hotel on Saturday, if it's fine? There's a very nice restaurant opening out into the garden, you know. It wouldn't be exciting exactly, but it would be a little change."

"It would be delightful," answered Jessie. "I like going out. I like a restaurant. I like the lights, and the people moving about, and the little tables, and the tinkle of the glasses and things."

Philip smiled. It touched him, somehow. There was a wonderful freshness and response in this young nature.

"You have a great faculty for enjoyment," he said, with a certain tone of regret in his voice.

By contrast he felt very old at that moment. The Colonel, who so far had accepted his increasing years with praiseworthy indifference and resignation, was dimly conscious of entertaining a deepening grudge against them,

"The rain is coming on again," he continued, after a minute's silence. "We'd better walk back to the villa—I mustn't let you get wet."

"One moment," cried the girl. "About England—you must be a little careful how you approach Mamma. She may not like it. You need not say that the suggestion came originally from me, need you?"

Undoubtedly, Jessie was very engaging just then. Her innocent flower of a face upturned, her sweet round mouth a little open, her whole attitude questioning and eager.

"You want very much to go?" asked the Colonel. He watched the girl keenly.

"Yes, yes, dreadfully," she replied.

"Very well; I will do my best. I will be a model of discretion. But now we must turn back; the rain 'll be down on us in five minutes."

"Jessie, Jessie! where have you been?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, as her step-daughter entered the chilly hall of the Villa Mortelli some ten minutes later. "We have been greatly alarmed about you. Antonio and Parker have been searching for you high and low."

In point of fact, the whole of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's household were gathered together in the hall:—Antonio, in his embroidered smoking-cap and gold-rimmed spectacles; Parker, upright and severe; Marie, the waiting-maid, with her square Swiss figure and high cheek-bones; Miss Keat, her mild, frog-like countenance and pale, protuberant eyes still bearing testimony to the tears shed over her packing, and her grey alpaca gown having a limpness of outline about it wholly consonant with a depressed mental attitude. Bertie Ames was standing near his handsome cousin, a rather inscrutable expression in his face. And, finally, Malvolio—clothed in a little red jacket, with a big frill round the neck of it, his long brown arms showing particularly lean and skinny out of the short open sleeves—filled, apparently, with an unwonted spirit of revelry, performed a series of wild and impish gymnastics about the shining marble balusters of the staircase in the background.

"We have been alarmed about you, Jessie," repeated Eleanor. "Nobody knew you had gone out. I have been very much agitated."

The girl pushed back the dark hood from her bright hair; her eyes were dancing; the moist air and exercise had deepened the delicate pink in her cheeks. There was a dainty air of defiance about her, a sudden assertion of personal liberty, as she stood in the middle of the inquiring group.

"I was quite safe," she said, clearly. "Colonel Enderby has been good enough to relieve the tedium of a very dull day by taking me for a walk."

"Oh, really!" murmured Mr. Ames, under his breath.

"You should have left word, Jessie, and saved us this anxiety," said her step-mother; but she spoke less urgently than at first.

That excellent woman, Parker, with many dismal observations regarding the dire consequences of wet boots, drove, without more ado, the young lady upstairs in front of her. Miss Keat's short round person disappeared too, presumably in the direction of her half-filled trunks.

Philip waited only a few minutes. He excused himself, and started back through the now pouring rain for the town. Decidedly there was something unpleasantly mysterious about the atmosphere of the Villa Mortelli: and yet, on the whole, he was glad that Mr. Drake had started alone that morning for Spezia.

CHAPTER VI.

A SEARCH FOR A VOCATION.

In England it is, of course, an acknowledged fact that marriages are made in heaven. In other countries—as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had occasion to point out to Colonel Enderby—they are chiefly made by the parents and guardians of the contracting parties. This, on the face of it, would not seem to be an unreasonable custom; but—in theory, anyway—British sentiment revolts against it.

British sentiment is a very remarkable and curious thing. It is worth thinking about; worth thinking about for the same reason that the origin of matter, and the origin of evil—I do not wish to bracket the two together in thought, only in speech—let us, by all means, avoid the heresy of the Manichees!—and the origin of life, and a good many other profound subjects are worth thinking about, namely, because they are incomprehensible. British sentiment is entirely incomprehensible. It has a fine disregard both for logic and for experience. If carefully considered, it may generally be found to embody an impressive and apparently successful denial of the axiom that it is impossible at one and the same time to serve both God and mammon. And out of this statement there grows a second thought—a gently entertaining one to the social historian, whose business it fortunately is, not to teach zealously, but to observe faithfully, and then set down his

observations. With what vigour and dignified alacrity the respectable Englishman entrenches himself behind his open Bible, and flings a text—almost any one will do—in your inquiring face; and with what consistent and high-handed indifference he treats the practical application of the majority of scriptural injunctions in daily life. If closely examined, the attitude of the said respectable Englishman presents a matter for sincere tears, or equally sincere laughter, as you regard it from the ideal or the realistic standpoint. We do not pretend to deal in the ideal, and therefore may permit ourselves a comfortable little chuckle.

But to return to the text. English marriages are made in heaven—which, being interpreted, means that the ordinary Anglo-Saxon is a very quiet and domestic sort of animal, who requires a wife. Having, however, at the same time, a curious necessity for the backing up of his own inclination with not only the Divine sanction, but with a warm and overflowing Divine approval, he has exalted marriage to the very highest place in the catalogue of good works, and has indeed made a virtue of necessity with a vengeance. British sentiment has come in, too, in all the force of its corporate strength, and has positively inundated us with admirable views on this subject, concerning which it has evolved a whole literature of fiction and biography. Far be it from me to speak lightly of that literature. It commands my highest respect; it is excellent; it is salutary; but it is also slightly inartistic, and may be briefly described as the apotheosis of suburban villas, solid worth, and side-whiskers.

If, in that humble, teachable, scientific spirit in which the social historian seeks to approach all phenomena and all questions presented to him—desiring always and only more clear understanding and fuller light—if, I say, he ventures to ask mildly:—And what about those marriages which expose the deplorable category of their conjugal infelicities to public scrutiny in the Divorce Court; or those other still sadder marriages, that end amid brutal words, and yet more brutal actions; or, again, those other marriages which drag on with distaste and recriminations, or, at best, dull paralyzing indifference and coldness, through long, weary years—are all these made in heaven? British sentiment, backed by British respectability, begs the inquirer, first of all, "not to be coarse;" and then goes on to inform him that these are not true marriages at all—"the people never really loved one another!" Well, that, of course, would be a most consolatory explanation of distressing phenomena, if one could accept it. Only, unluckily, observation and experience do not bear it out very fully.

For, alas! love—the love that leads to marriage—whether that marriage prove a very crown of life, or a gateway opening into regions most distinctly purgatorial—would hardly seem to be pre-ordained and predestinate, let down bodily from above. Experience rarely justifies these exalted notions of supreme destiny or of diligent arrangement on the part of the Higher Powers. In nine cases out of ten, that love is more the result of propinquity than of predestination. No celestial architect is required to raise for Love a fair and fateful dwelling-place, let British sentiment, arm-in-arm with British respectability, frown and thunder as they may. The house of Love may be builded easily enough by any man and woman, out of such commonplace materials as a dance, or a song, a light laugh, a lingering pressure of hands, or those meaningless tears that come so easily into a young girl's eyes.

Love would seem to be very humble-minded. He bids no heralds and ambassadors go before him, with blare of trumpets and waving of banners. He comes at hap-hazard along quiet country lanes, among gleams of moonlight over dewy lawns; he meets us on the crowded city crossing, amid the shouts of the drivers, and under the very feet of the omnibus horses; he has even taken to travelling in prosaic railway carriages in these latter days, and that with a disregard of class almost painfully democratic. He is quick, and subtle, and fearless; yet he comes softly and silently, stealing up without observation. And at first we laugh at his pretty face, which is the face of a merry, earthly child; but his hands, when we take them, grasp like hands of iron, and his strength is as the strength of a giant, and his heart is as the heart of a tyrant. And he gives us to drink of a cup in which sweet is mingled with bitter; and the sweet, too often, is soon forgotten, while the taste of the bitter remains. And we hardly know whether to bless him or curse him, for he has changed all things; and we cannot tell whether to weep for the old world we have lost, or shout for joy at the new world we have found. Such is love for the great majority; a matter terrestrial rather than celestial, and of doubtful happiness after all.

But it is high time to leave these easily enunciated generalities, and return to Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, whose communications had produced anything but an agreeable impression upon the mind of our friend the Colonel.

Eleanor, notwithstanding many faults and shortcomings, was a woman of a large and generous nature. She was clever; but clever rather through instinctive sympathy and emotion than through force of intellect. She could boast no general scheme of

philosophy, with its careful balancing of evil against good and good against evil. A calm and widely comprehensive view was almost impossible to her. It was not the least comfort to her to trace the logical sequence of events; nor could she lose her inherent horror of individual suffering in a quiet scientific appreciation of the orderly development of the law of cause and effect. She did not care a fig about necessary consequences; but she cared deeply that a man or woman—specially, perhaps, the former—should be in pain or sorrow or want. She had a native impulsion, of which, possibly, she was a trifle proud, to dry tears, bind up broken hearts, and administer almost dangerously strong doses of pity and consolation. Such a woman is for ever flinging herself *à corps perdu* into situations of which, when the first excitement of her feeling has worn off, she is liable to get a little tired. Relations with her are likely to be stormy. You had better make hay while the sun does shine, and keep constantly in mind the fact that it is certain not to shine very continuously.

As quite a girl, handsome, ardent, and romantic, Eleanor Ames had, for good or evil, met with Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay.

A tall, fair-haired young soldier, in bitter grief for the death of his pretty young wife, with a broad band of crape round his arm, and a lovely little motherless child by his side, is, undoubtedly, an object calculated to awaken a warm thrill of commiseration in every female heart. Eleanor forgot those other gentlemen of her acquaintance upon whom she had been wont to expend a certain amount of thought and consideration. Marriage with a bachelor seemed to her a very insipid affair. The ideal office of a woman was that of consoler; the ideal condition that of motherhood—even of step-motherhood, if necessary. Eleanor consoled the young soldier to such good purpose, that in three months from the date of their first meeting he had married her.

I do not pretend to offer any theory regarding the origin of this marriage, and pronounce it heavenly or anything else. My business is merely, in a faithful and diligent manner, to record facts. Beau Pierce-Dawnay was a great, simple, good-natured gentleman, who, when the halo of romance which surrounded him in his character of broken-hearted widower had faded and he was looked at in the light of common day, presented no very wonderful or mysteriously affecting characteristics.

Eleanor wanted an office. She wanted to go on consoling; but, unfortunately, Captain Pierce-Dawnay did not now stand in the slightest need of consolation. He pronounced himself to be "as jolly as a sand-boy," and was immensely bewildered when he made out that his beautiful wife was not at all pleased at the

announcement. At last, still both devoted and bewildered, poor Beau was ordered out to India, and Eleanor took to wandering. She had been a good deal in Italy before her marriage, and the fascination of that strangely absorbing country drew her back to it again. After her husband's death she stayed on. England had become distasteful to her. She had a craving for the sunshine, the flowers, the rich emotions, the glamour and endless suggestion of southern life.

An ardent and sympathetic woman, with no duties dependent on her position to regulate her action and satisfy her imagination, is apt to run a little wild. Eleanor had many hobbies. She could not be accused of riding them to death; because, before the poor things had arrived at a fatal stage of exhaustion, she got tired of each one of them in turn, and cantered hopefully away on some fresh steed. Schemes of emigration, the down-trodden condition of the Italian peasantry, the emancipation of woman, all engaged her attention in turn. One year she was distracted about the sufferings of animals, and made herself sick with horror over the revolting details of scientific cruelties. Later, under the influence of some of those devout and somewhat damnatory British Christians who yearly haunt the shores of the Mediterranean during the winter months, she grew anxious as to the future of her soul. She went to prayer-meetings held in the disused ballrooms of large hotels; she read trying little books by obscure authors, bound in the crudest, most uncultivated of colours, on instantaneous answer to prayer, and so forth; she subscribed largely to societies for the wholesale conversion of German Jews, and other equally practical objects.

But Eleanor's sympathies were really too wide and deep to flow long within the artificial barriers of any one sect or system. Nothing but a general reconstruction of society, whereby sorrow and crying and pain would be for ever abolished, and a universal panacea applied to this poor world's creaking joints, half-blind eyes, and open sores, could pacify the passion of pity which was growing within her. She began to consort with rather dangerous company. Persons fluent of speech, and generous of subversive ideas, began to haunt her little *appartement* in Florence, and keep up loud and enthusiastic discussions till the small hours of the morning. When a woman takes to revolutionary politics, be it in ever so mild a form, she is indeed skating on very thin ice. A convent, a lunatic asylum, or a husband—either will do; perhaps, even, rightly considered, there is a certain affinity between the three—becomes imperatively necessary.

Just at this critical period of her career, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay

happened to meet her cousin, Bertie Ames, at the Baths of Lucca, where she was spending part of the summer. She had not seen much of him for a considerable length of time. The two had certainly cherished a species of fondness for one another long ago; but Bertie Ames, in those days, had been a young man with the world too much at his feet to make many claims upon his cousin's pity. She had enjoyed dancing with him, flirting with him, and so on, well enough; but he had not entered into the serious business of her affections. She had only regarded him as an agreeable and decorative sort of superfluity.

But at the Baths of Lucca, in 1874, Mr. Ames presented a very different spectacle to his charming and warm-hearted cousin. He was just recovering from a serious illness. He was weak and depressed, miserable both in mind and body. His large brown eyes had a look of sadness in them which went straight to Eleanor's heart. An old man-servant of his father's, Antonio by name, and an ill-favoured little monkey appeared to be his only companions. He appealed to Eleanor's imagination, first as a specimen of suffering humanity, and then as a relative. Family affection has a habit of asserting itself with remarkable vigour in the heart of a woman, when the object of that feeling is an attractive man.

Eleanor resisted neither family affection nor the moan of suffering humanity. She devoted herself to Mr. Ames, and he repaid her with sincere gratitude. He went further. He confided in her; he told her the details of that history which, two years later, she briefly recounted, as has already been stated, to Colonel Enderby. Eleanor entered with generous warmth of feeling into the situation. She erected poor, not very admirable Bertie into a hero. She gloried in his devotion to the ashes of an expiring passion. She lavished upon him both her time and her imagination. She realized his sufferings even more keenly, possibly, than he realized them himself.

To do Mr. Ames justice, he was profoundly touched by her kindness. He possessed in a high degree that lively sense of, and interest in, the society of women, which is undeniably more completely developed in the Latin than in the Teutonic races. To members of the former, a woman always has a peculiar and exciting interest. She is never taken quite for granted, and reckoned—as Jack Enderby, for instance, reckoned his wife—as a capital good fellow and ordinary companion in arms. We Teutons are very decent, and a trifle suspicious too. Bertie Ames was only half a Teuton, and he put a very high value on the enjoyment of his cousin's presence and ministrations.

When the time came for Eleanor to leave the Baths of Lucca, she found herself singularly unwilling to leave Mr. Ames as well. Quite a moving little scene took place, during which a number of excellent things were said about friendship, and the delightful relation of brother and sister. The end of it all was that Bertie, Antonio, and the monkey travelled back with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, Jessie, Miss Keat, and that estimable woman, Parker, to Florence.

Some persons advised themselves to be a good deal scandalized at this last eccentricity of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's; but the majority of her acquaintance, knowing her real goodness of heart, and bearing in mind the excellent reputation which, though a young and pretty woman, and her own mistress for so many years, she had always enjoyed—the majority, I say, contented themselves with smiling, shrugging their shoulders, and observing that the charming widow had exchanged a general scheme of benevolence for a particular one.

Still it must be owned that a decided change came over her way of living. The promoters of Jewish conversion found their attentions quite at a discount; neither encouragement nor subscriptions were any longer forthcoming. Eleanor began to go out a good deal into society instead of entertaining the reformers of society at her own house. These latter gentlemen made a valiant attempt to regain their former position with her. They hinted broadly at the moral danger consequent on putting the hand to the plough and afterwards looking back—looking back, too, in the direction of a specimen of that most noxious class of mankind which eats its bread in idleness, and hugs the aristocratic idea. They denounced Mr. Ames as a viper, a scorpion, a hateful parasite on the wounded and shuddering body of corporate humanity. To all of which rather violent language Bertie replied by saying in his softest tones, one evening, to his hostess—

"Dear Cousin Nell, I think you mustn't let those amiable maniacs come here any more. They are, no doubt, immensely amusing; but you may have a little too much to pay in the end for that style of comedy. We must regulate our entertainments, more or less, by the length of our purses, you know."

It must be admitted that, with all their many virtues, women have not nearly so innate a sense of the lesser dignities of living as men. They cannot—perhaps owing to want of physical strength—pay as much attention to that outward ritual which makes life proceed, even in private, with self-respect and punctuality. An establishment in which there is no man is liable to be uncertain as to hours, messy as to meals, unmethodical in many ways, and even occasionally—though one mentions it with fear and trembling

—hardly as careful of cleanliness as it might be. Those wonderful women of the future, the result of several generations of high school and university culture, who are going to improve us vastly in so many ways, may possibly add masculine appreciation of small dignities and privacies to their other excellences; may have learnt to prefer butcher's meat to miscellaneous editions of tea and toast at odd hours, and to regard morning wrappers as part of the livery of that slavery from which they fondly believe they have escaped for ever. But, meanwhile, there is no denying that a household gains perceptibly in good tone and outward regularity from the moment a man becomes a member of it. Women are for ever making short cuts to comfort; a man, on the other hand, walks straight along the high-road towards that desirable object, and, I venture to think, generally succeeds in reaching it the first.

The complexion of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's little establishment improved very much from the time Mr. Ames, Antonio, and the monkey became recognized members of it. Bertie, who had inherited considerable business capacity from his English father, as well as considerable emotional capacity from his Italian mother, took his cousin's financial affairs in hand, and set them on a more secure basis than they had been on for a long while. It may be added that he had an excellent taste for the decorative side of life generally, and continued to create a very graceful *entourage* for himself and his relations.

Jessie at this time was just eighteen, and was to come out, as the phrase is, that winter. In point of fact, she came out very effectually. Bertie Ames forgot some of his private griefs in watching the girl's brilliant enjoyment of society; while Eleanor threw herself, with all her accustomed ardour, into the situation. Jessie proved, undoubtedly, a success; and her step-mother was honestly delighted at that fact—all the more so, probably, because her relations with the girl had not been entirely satisfactory in the past.

Owing to her sundry and manifold schemes for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind, Eleanor's interest in her step-daughter had been spasmodic in character. If Jessie was ill, then she gathered her into the arms of affection, and lavished tendernesses upon her. But Jessie was very rarely ill. She grew up as some fair, healthy plant grows up in a fertile soil, strong and straight. She made few demands upon the sympathy of others; there was a refined vigour about her, and a happy immunity from those nervous affections which so often beset growing girls.

Eleanor had elaborate theories regarding education, drawn alternately from Rousseau's "Emile," Richter's "Levana," and

from the axioms of the last Woman's Rights prophetess she happened to have come in contact with. Practically Jessie held to the teaching of Jean Jacques, though innocent of any acquaintance with the writings of that much-abused philosopher, and followed where Nature led her. She had a remarkable aptitude both for music and languages, though the theory of the one and the grammar of the other meant little enough to her. Her talent was essentially practical and verbal, a desire for something articulate and rapidly expressive.

For her step-mother's hobbies she had but small comprehension, and an equally limited interest. Jessie from a child had possessed a great capacity for being bored if people became earnest or imperative. She would just go away and leave them. It is to be feared that her sense of obligation to the needs and claims of her fellow-creatures was not very lively. She loved sunshine, movement, exercise, and all natural objects; she established relations with all manner of living creatures—was friendly with gold-fish, and intimate with cats and canaries. When poor Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, becoming troubled—under the auspices of her revivalist friends—about the condition of her own soul, extended her solicitude to Jessie's soul also, the girl met her anxious and penetrating words first with amusement, and then with something very like anger. For, indeed, in the fulness of her youthful vitality and the keenness of her powers of enjoyment, Jessie had about as much conception of the deeper needs of the human spirit as a butterfly, hawking on a gay summer's day over a bank of honeysuckle and wild roses, might be expected to have. She declined to take the slightest interest in the emancipation of her sex, being, as she said, quite unconscious of being enslaved; the Italian peasants contrived to wear charming dresses, even though they might be supposed by imaginative persons to be short of some other necessaries of life; as to the German Jews, they were extremely ugly, and, as she added, with an irresistible wrinkling up of her pretty little nose, they also usually smelt.

Poor Eleanor's enthusiasms were met by this radiant creature with calm common sense. There was something curiously baffling to her in her step-daughter's personality. Sometimes the elder woman, whose ardent nature demanded warm affection and intimate intercourse, would exercise all her power to fascinate the girl. Then Jessie would smile in her brilliant way, and say, "Ah! now, little mamma, now you are adorable."—But when her step-mother went on to entreat for more love, a fuller measure of trust and sympathy, Jessie became bewildered, even cross, and

would retire gracefully, but firmly, to the less exacting society of her gold-fish or canaries. And Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned away, sighing rather bitterly, to throw herself—metaphorically speaking, of course—into the arms of the socialists, or anti-vivisectionists, or any other misery-mongers who happened to be handy at the moment. Step-mothers, poor things, have established a very unenviable reputation in literature. In real life, it may be questioned whether they are not frequently more sinned against than sinning.

Jessie spent two very gay winters in Florence. She was admired, *fêted*, petted. The young lady had more than one admirer whose attentions were weighted with serious intentions; but the girl herself had an inclination to be slightly annoyed with admiration when it put on an importunate complexion. She was as spontaneously merry as a kitten, and as untroubled by sentimental perturbations.

Eleanor's humour, meanwhile, had changed notably during these two years. Her mind had been invaded by a new idea, which came to possess it with perilous completeness and intensity. She wearied of Florence; she began to long for solitude, for silence, for an immunity from the distractions of society. Bertie Ames had friends in Genoa, and so it fell out that, in the autumn of 1876, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's rather miscellaneous *ménage* removed itself to the comparative retirement of the little red villa.

BOOK THIRD.

LOVER AND MISTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH PHILIP MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

It is surprising how soon you may acquire a habit, and how soon that habit will come to fit you as easily and comfortably as an old glove. If Colonel Enderby had been told, on his first arrival at the Villa Mortelli, that he would walk up there every day for the best part of the coming fortnight, and that each recurring visit would prove less irksome to him than the last, he would have refused to credit the statement. And yet, in truth, he was becoming more than tolerant of that diurnal pilgrimage. I am afraid the Colonel can hardly be acquitted of a charge of procrastination just at this period. Every day he started with an intention of speaking frankly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay about the advisability of a return, for a time, at least, to England; every day he went back to his hotel at night without having delivered his piece of advice. It was difficult somehow. There never seemed to be a good opening, or happy opportunity. Eleanor did not invite her guest to participate in any more private interviews. She avoided all personal and intimate communications, and contented herself with being agreeable on broad general grounds. She was a clever woman, with a considerable habit of society, and she really was very pleasant to Colonel Enderby; but she took care not to find herself alone with him. Jessie or Mr. Ames was always present.

The little dinner at the restaurant passed off excellently; and, as now the spring days were bright and long, Eleanor pronounced this a capital opportunity for seeing something of the country around Terzia. She planned long drives to distant villages on the coast,—charming, little, old-world places, with tall, discoloured houses facing the purple sea; where dark-eyed

girls and women—whose pale cotton garments, innocent of starch, present a softness of outline and exquisite delicacy of tone, yellow, pink, or purple, not unworthy of some classic picture—stand in long lines hauling in the seine-nets upon the shelving beach, or lay their week's washing out to bleach on the rough, grey shingle.

The Corniche road leaves the low shore-line sometimes here, and diverges inland among the wooded valleys where the nightingales sing, passing by deep rocky watercourses, where the narcissus, with its fragrant flowers and sheaf of sword-shaped leaves, grows down at the stream-side; by orchards, where fruit-trees are all white and pink with innumerable blossoms, and, in the cool grass beneath them fresh with the winter rains, the fat velvety brown blossoms of the bee-orchis show dark against the full rich green. And to all these scenes Jessie Pierce-Dawnay's bright presence lent an indefinable charm. The girl was so frankly and fearlessly glad.

A certain glamour was coming over Philip Enderby's spirit. He was in no haste to urge the return to England. Spezia had faded into the far distance. Poor Mr. Drake might continue his little tour alone. The Colonel was growing curiously reconciled to this idle manner of life. He was very well contented, especially when Mr. Ames—to whom in private he occasionally applied not very flattering epithets—and his monkey were out of the way. He began to have some warmer feeling than mere toleration for those large, faded, shady rooms at the Villa Mortelli. He was, in fact, insensibly collecting a gallery of pleasing mental pictures, in every one of which the central figure was that of a fair girl,—leaning back in a carriage, her hands full of flowers, while the fresh sea-wind ruffled her hair; loitering on the sunny terrace under the shade of a red umbrella; wandering among the tangled luxuriance of the neglected garden; sitting and playing brilliant vivid music at the piano, in a dusky corner of the large drawing-room; now and then a trifle tired or pensive, asking some small service which it was a tender privilege to render her. Ah! really Colonel Enderby was very well entertained just now. He did not analyze the situation, but he most distinctly appreciated it.

On the second Sunday of his stay at Terzia, it happened that he did not make his way up to the villa till quite late. Several things detained him, and combined to induce in him a humour not completely in sympathy with the atmosphere of that peculiarly constituted establishment.

In the morning Philip fulfilled the whole duty of man by attending the English service, held in one of the back rooms of

the hotel. There are three separate things which the British tourist demands, and woe to the hotel which does not hasten to supply them—no respectable Anglo-Saxon boot-sole will ever cross its threshold! Two of these things are for the body; the third is for the soul—a proportion not without meaning, perhaps. The British tourist must be accommodated with sponge-baths, open fireplaces,—and an English chaplain. The hotel-manager at Terzia had early realized the existence of this trinity of necessities on the part of his clients, and had done his best to meet them.

Mr. Drake's acquaintance, the little, ferret-faced clergyman, officiated; while his attendant ladies—the good man, being apparently desirous of making the most of the apostolic permission, was "leading about" a wife, a sister, and two sisters-in-law—with laudable zeal, undertook, supported by an antiquated and tinny piano, to supply the musical portion of the performance. The sermon—that unfortunately inevitable incident in the Anglican church service—consisted of an extempore address on Belshazzar's feast. The subject is sufficiently full of impressive, if mysterious, suggestion in the original narrative. Unluckily, the preacher elected to treat it from a symbolic point of view. Everything was diligently explained to mean something else; and in proportion as his grammar became more doubtful and his types more obscure, the worthy little man's voice waxed louder and louder, and his aspect became more combative and defiant. At length he absolutely bellowed forth a string of formless sentences, mainly suggestive of an exegetical and doctrinal chaos. One is bound to suppose there is something singularly grateful to the professional palate in this style of discourse, since one is so frequently fated to hear it. To the unsophisticated layman it is slightly bewildering, and offers but doubtful help towards the conduct of life, or the understanding of matters eternal.

Philip, being but a simple-minded person, did not derive any sensible measure of illumination from the latter part of the exercises of the morning. In the afternoon he went for a walk among the hills. The day was radiant, the air quick with the breath of the sea-breeze.

Turning off the main road, at the outskirts of the town, he passed up the steep paved way between the vineyard walls, to a little village church, with a tall red and yellow painted campanile, standing on the hillside about a mile from Terzia. It was the hour for afternoon service. The bells jangled, harsh and imperative, in the high tower; while on the low wall fronting the flat space before the church door, men and lads sat lazily chatting and laughing. The village priest—a kindly bright-eyed man, in a

worn cassock and rusty skull-cap—wandered, his hands clasped behind him and his tall lean figure somewhat bent, from group to group, speaking a word to one and another with genial familiarity.

Inside the church, dim with the coloured gloom of stained windows and frescoed walls, a large company of peasant women sat or knelt, the gay silk handkerchiefs tied over their heads making them look like a great bed of gaudy spring tulips. The air was warm and heavy with a lingering odour of incense; there was a suppressed murmur of voices, stir of footsteps, and rustle of garments.

In his character of English traveller, Philip felt he had a right to look at anything that presented itself. He stepped within the open church door; but, I grieve to say, there were certain uncultivated and Protestant tendencies in his spiritual constitution which prevented his being in very warm sympathy with the scene. He loved out-of-doors; and Catholicism, with all its splendour and wide appeal to the imagination, has little enough of out-of-doors about it. It lets in the sunshine through cunningly painted glass, on which it has portrayed the orthodox conception of the ends and aims of mortal existence. Our friend the Colonel was tempted to fancy the white light of truth painfully obscured by passing through this coloured medium.

Be that as it may, he had soon seen as much as he cared to see of the village church. He turned up a narrow path at the back of it, and, after passing through the belt of olive trees—whose tremulous silvery shade is not so much shade, after all, as broken light—through thickets of myrtle and tall Mediterranean heath, on the straight spires of which the withered blossoms showed golden brown, he reached the outer edge of the pine woods high on the mountain-side.

Far below lay the vineyards and gardens, and the houses of the town glittering in the keen dazzling light. Beyond, the sea stretched away to the southern horizon. The bells of the little village church clanged out wildly for a few minutes more, and then, with a final crash and bang, ceased suddenly. No sound broke the silence save the whisper of the wind in the pine trees, rising and falling in a soft and rhythmic cadence, like that of summer waves on a quiet sandy shore. A glad repose, a sabbath stillness, came over the beautiful land.

Philip Enderby threw himself at full length on the deep brown bed of fallen pine-needles; and as he lay there in the warm sunshine, looking up at the red-barked branches, and dark glossy foliage of the trees outlined clear and sharp against the deep blue-purple of the sky, pleasant thoughts and hopes came to him.

Formless hopes that he could hardly have set out in words, yet which brought to his soul deeper meaning than all the ungainly profundity of the sermon he had listened to that morning, and a larger peace and promise than that imaged forth in the rich gloom of the church, with its half-seen pictures and banners, down below.

Yes, let excited philanthropists, and humanitarian ecclesiastics, and other energetic, improving, and actively virtuous persons say what they may,—it is very good at times to get away into silence and solitude. To get away from all the noise and struggle of man, with his arts and sciences and magnificent schemes, so often abortive, and his poor little space of anxious, self-conscious years, and his mixed motives and feverish efforts. To get away beyond all histories, with their sounds of wailing and battle, their stains of sin and of blood; beyond all the philosophies, with their vain attempts to square the circle and reconcile that which can never be reconciled; beyond all the formulas and all the creeds, with their bitter hatreds, their arbitrary assertions and negations; beyond, yes, beyond the very sense of right and wrong itself, back, back to the great serene heart of Nature—a heart beating with primal and exhaustless energy, yet calm and restrained; filled with the rapture and repose of limitless power and victorious attainment. It is good to get back and lie on the warm bosom of the eternal mother, the folds of whose garments are the high mountains, whose feet are set in the laughing ocean, and whose life is the life of the world;—to lie there, while the soul slips away from the sense of its own paltry joys and sorrows, from the narrow hopes and fears of the individual lot; to be made one with the glorious order of created things, the flesh and spirit no longer conscious of weary fightings and divisions; to dream of the everlasting mysteries of birth and growth, and of the fulness of strength and of the failing of strength, and of decay—and of the mystery of transmuted force, of life again returning out of death, to begin once more the ceaseless round of existence anew; to dream of the mystery of night and morning, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, rain and shine, while through all the countless ages the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness broods for ever over the broad bright land and sea. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" Get back, back to the mother of all, and listen, —peradventure she may speak to you.

Philip Enderby, lying there under the pine trees, in the afternoon sunshine, had a perception of unspeakable trust and confidence, of belief in a final reconciliation far away, far off out of mortal sight. For a little space he dimly grasped the strange secret of the Buddhist Nirvana—that state of acquiescent contem-

plation, passionless and impersonal, without movement, without desire, which, in the estimation of some of the purest spirits, constitutes the highest conception of perfect and enduring bliss.

"Thank God for this beautiful world," he said to himself quietly and reverently.

The sun was sloping towards the west, and the shadows were growing long, when he rose up at last. Voices of the peasants making their way back from the village church came up on the sea-breeze from the winding paths below. The spell indeed was broken, but the impression it had made remained for a while yet. Philip wandered down towards the vineyards, amazed, filled with a solemn gladness—like a man who has seen a vision, and spoken, face to face, with the gods.

But alas! these happy moments of clear insight and illumination are but moments after all. The discords of our over-civilized and artificial life soon drown the music of the spheres; the fair face of heaven is too soon obscured again by storms of passion; while jealousy, self-will, hatred, and fear, like evil beasts, root up and trample underfoot the fruitful land. "Man never continueth in one stay"—which is, after all, extremely fortunate for the dramatist and writer of fiction. Let us console ourselves! —for indeed life at this admirably ideal level would interfere fatally with our excellent system of large profits and quick returns.

Colonel Enderby, as he loitered among the olives, thought that perhaps he would not go up to the Villa Mortelli at all that evening. The silent hour on the mountain-side had done much to loosen the chain of habit that was fastening on him. He was aware of a sudden sense of aloofness from the life of the villa—from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with her sad secret and dark beauty; from Bertie Ames, with his soft voice and air of a mild Mephistopheles. He had drunk deep of the cup of nature. He could hardly go straight back and drink their thin *vin ordinaire*, and listen to the social gossip of a lady who was more than half in love with a gentleman of rather shady antecedents; who, on his part, was greatly disposed to adore her step-daughter. The good Colonel, you see, permitted himself to state the case a trifle coarsely just then, and the contrast it offered to his late emotions was too glaring. He paused, with a slight movement of disgust.

He leaned against the gnarled grey trunk of one of the old olives, and felt for his cigar-case. He had been a good deal moved. A smoke would steady him.

"Decidedly," he muttered, "I am not quite in the humour for those people just now."

Yet in saying this the Colonel was conscious of making a

mental reservation. "Those people" did not include Jessie, somehow. He thought, with a sense of relief, of the girl's bright glancing looks and guileless laughter. She was as fresh and natural, and far from all subtle undercurrent of sinister meaning, as the resinous scent of the pine trees, or the babble and glitter of the mountain streams.

"She would understand it all well enough," he thought. His clear eyes softened, and he smiled quietly to himself. "She would never strike a false note, or be out of tune with feelings like these."

Colonel Enderby's smile broadened a little. It changed its character from tenderness to amusement.

"I wonder which of my feelings she would be out of tune with, though?" he added. "I am afraid I am beginning to be a little too much aware of that young lady. Is it possible that she is growing dangerous?"

He walked on down the hillside, not looking very carefully where he was going, but following the path mechanically.

"If they do go back to England, half a dozen good-looking young fellows will be over head and ears in love with her in the first month."

It was surprising how vindictive he felt at the thought of those same good-looking young fellows.

"And why the devil shouldn't they be in love with her? What more reasonable? And what possible concern is it of mine?"

Colonel Enderby stopped short. The vision had faded. He was no longer face to face with the gods. But he was face to face with something which at moments is hardly less overpowering and incomprehensible, perhaps, than the presence of a divinity would be—he was face to face with his own heart. He was conscious of a sharp self-revelation which filled him both with pain and pleasure; with a sense of exultation and yet of irremediable folly.

"I am in love," he said. "I, at eight and forty:—I, who have never cared for a woman in that way since Cecilia Murray:—I, who reckoned myself as safe as a church; an elderly friend and adviser, interested of course, filled with a sort of fatherly regard—I am in love, in love with a beautiful girl of barely twenty."

He was aware of strangely conflicting emotions. It is so keenly pleasurable to have stirrings of vivid sensation; to let the imagination dwell on one fair face and form, which seems to gather up in itself lovely promises, unnumbered hopes, the delight of untold possibilities. And when the face and form in question are those of a young girl, innocent, inexperienced, before whom

the years stretch out as a land of promise, there is indeed an inexpressible charm in the position! A man longs to write noble poems on the blank pages of the maiden's book of life; to keep it free from all smirch or stain, from all knowledge of sin, and shame, and sorrow. There is a passion of reverence, almost of pity, mingling with the love of an honest man for a pure girl, which makes it the most exquisite, perhaps, of all human sentiments. "He is the first that ever burst into that silent sea:"—and in that thought there is, for certain natures, positive rapture, an aroma fresh as that of mountain flowers, a living delight as in the breath of the wind of morning.

Philip Enderby drew himself up to his full height. He rejoiced in his fine physical health, in his vigour of body, as he walked rapidly along the steep paved lane between the vineyard walls. He was still in his prime; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay herself had told him so, and it was true.

But these gracious thoughts did not last long. Wiser and sadder ones followed; practical considerations of disagreeable cogency. Reason critically examined the situation, and, alas! appeared disinclined to strengthen the hands of emotion and desire. Eight and twenty years is a wide interval between the respective ages of wife and husband. Not only is the disparity ungraceful; but Colonel Enderby realized bitterly that it might amount to being actually perilous. He was not a vain man, and was not disposed to over-estimate his own powers of attraction. Then, too, his quick appreciation of what was natural and harmonious influenced him, perhaps, unnecessarily at this juncture. The high value he set on the freshness and spontaneity which were such conspicuous qualities in Jessie, made the idea of her marrying a man whom it would be absurd to call anything but middle-aged almost distressingly incongruous to him. Philip revolted from anything in human relation which appeared to him distorted, or approaching ever so faintly to what he would have called grotesque.

"A decrepit old man with a beautiful young woman tied to him is a hateful object," he broke out at last. "People sentimentalize over it and call it touching and pathetic. It is disgusting. Do I want to condemn a pretty woman, some fifteen years hence, when she is at her best, to tucking me up in bed of a night, and feeding me with gruel, and helping to wrap shawls round my gouty old feet; and perhaps—there's no saying how low one may fall at last—to walking about by my bath-chair at some beastly watering-place?"

Colonel Enderby shook himself.

"Pah! disgusting!" he said. "No, no; I'm a fool ever to have thought of it. It's all utter folly and madness. Somebody ought to clap me into a lunatic asylum. A man's not fit to be about loose who is liable to lose his head in this sort of way."

Colonel Enderby dined by himself in the restaurant that evening. He did not feel in the humour to meet the ferret-faced clergyman and his following, and all the other miscellaneous collection of guests, at the *table d'hôte*. He sat alone at a little table, by a large French window standing open on to the hotel garden. There was a sound of many feet in the main street of the town as the dusk closed in. Companies of young men strolled up and down, singing together in full deep voices a wild wailing chant, which seemed to tell of "old unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago." Then suddenly would come a snatch of violin music, dying away again, as the player passed on between the high painted houses, into silence, with a plaintive lingering cry. The hall porter, his long green coat plentifully decorated with gold lace, slowly lighted the numerous gas-lamps in the square garden; stopping now and again to exchange a word or two with the Colonel's black-headed little waiter,—who had dawdled out, napkin on arm, to take a survey of things in general between the courses. There was a blending of light, and movement, and rich colour, and light-hearted laughter with those suggestions of age, and weariness, and regret, that are hardly ever absent from Italian scenes. The country is too ancient; it means too much. The life of to-day merely plays like a fitful iridescence on the great stream of memories which sweeps past us with such awful strength and indifference.

Philip had left peace up among the pine woods on the still slopes of the Apennines. Here was man once more, crowding, crushing forward, generation after generation, down the manifold ages of history; the same stories told over and over again, through an endless procession of human lives. The last, the man of to-day, troubled with the same questions, the same maddening desires, the same degrading necessities, and as far away too, apparently, from the heart of absolute truth as the stern dark old Romans of the Republic; or the splendid and licentious Romans of the Empire; or the savage hordes of barbarian Goths and Franks, and Lombards; or the dim, chivalrous children of the Middle Ages; or the glittering, rapturous sons and daughters of the Renaissance; or the weary watchers for the dawn of returning liberty in the long sad night of Austrian and Papal supremacy.

Colonel Enderby, well dressed, well off, solidly English, sitting comfortably at dinner at the open window of a modern hotel, and

looking out calmly into the narrow streets of an unimportant north Italian town, was still haunted and oppressed with a perception of these things. The past seemed to over shadow and absorb him, threatening to swallow up his individuality. Thousands of men had wandered along the flowery path of love, all unsuspecting, as he had. Thousands of men had staked their life's happiness on a woman's smile, and the clasp of a woman's hand. Thousands had turned away disappointed, sick at heart, consumed with unsatisfied desire. Nay, more, thousands had got all they dreamed of or hoped for, and, in the end thereof, weariness and sorrow. It was the old, old story over again.

The black-headed waiter, who had found conversation agreeable, rather to the neglect of more obvious duties, hurried in suddenly.

"Would monsieur the colonel have dessert? There was an excellent *compôte* of fruits?"

No, monsieur the colonel would not have dessert. Monsieur the colonel had arrived at conclusions. He went up to his own room and dressed himself for the evening with scrupulous precision. He stopped a moment in the hall on coming down again, and asked the porter for a light for his cigar. The man brought it and then remarked, as he helped Philip on with his overcoat—

"They have company at the Villa Mortelli to-day. Two English ladies, a little boy, and a maid. Antonio, Madame Pierce-Dawnay's servant—whom, doubtless, monsieur has often seen—has been down to secure rooms for them."

Colonel Enderby did not bestow much attention upon this announcement; he was busy with his own thoughts. He was going to tell Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that, as she had honoured him with her confidence, he would strongly urge upon her the advisability of an immediate journey to England. He was also going to say good-bye. He had settled definitely to go on to Spezia to-morrow.

CHAPTER II.

A SPRING NIGHT.

Good resolutions are a pleasant crop to sow. The seed springs up so readily, the blossoms open so soon and make such a brave show—specially just at first. We are full of self-congratulation; we point to our patch of garden ground with pardonable pride, and ask if anything ever promised better. But when the time of flowers has passed, what as to the fruit? Well, it must be

admitted that the fruit has a bad habit of maturing but slowly, and that the wind too often brings it down before it is well ripe. Everybody knows what an unsatisfactory thing wind-fallen fruit is. After all the trouble it has given us in the earlier stages of growth, we grudge to let it lie on the ground and rot; and yet if, in an economical spirit, we gather it together and eat it, it has an undeniable tendency to prove unwholesome, and produce that inelegant and painful disorder vulgarly known as the colic.

Philip Enderby's good resolutions were in very full bloom as he walked up on that Sunday evening to the little red villa. In saying this the writer does not, for a moment, wish to raise a smile at the Colonel's expense. Far from it. To those who look below the surface and recognize how very seldom men and women do actually sacrifice their own desires to the ruling of an idea, there is something fine in such a man's directness and singleness of purpose; in his voluntary self-abnegation; in his readiness to do violence to his own feelings, if, by the doing of such violence, he can preserve what appears to him an ideal fitness of things. There is a grain of heroism, surely, in an honest acknowledgment of one's own disabilities—a heroism all the more rare of attainment because unsurrounded with romance and glamour, because not in the very least exciting.

Colonel Enderby had determined to stand aside, to efface himself, not so much as to hint at his own feelings. They were strong—strong enough in all conscience, as he owned to himself, almost with shame—but he himself was stronger. He looked the matter fairly in the face, judged it, and turned away. He thought it would be little short of dishonourable to trade upon Jessie's innocence and inexperience, to use his love, still more his age or loneliness, as a claim upon her pity. The Colonel, by the way, accredited Jessie with a number of virtues, of the existence of which her conduct and conversation had given but limited indications. But, then, lovers have a proverbial power of balancing inverted pyramids, going to sea in sieves, and successfully performing other feats of a kindred nature, impossible to a faithless and unbelieving generation.

The girl must go to England, he thought. She was pretty enough and original enough to make a distinguished marriage. She should marry a man, young, brilliant, and hopeful as herself. And when that small voice, which is not the voice of conscience, but the voice of something quite the reverse of conscience—devout persons have gone so far as to fancy it the voice of Satan himself,—when this voice began to suggest objections, to ask him inconvenient questions—when, for instance, it inquired, "What and if

this imaginary brilliant young man turns out a gambler, a profligate, or a drunkard?"—Philip remained firm and clear-sighted. The fate which lay before Jessie in the future, it was no business of his to predict. God knew; and it was not for him, Philip Enderby, to indulge his own passion under the specious pretence of acting special providence to her, and protecting her from possible trouble. His duty was to leave her free; free as the soft breeze of the spring night. To speak his mind fearlessly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, and then go away and forget—for Philip had no morbid craving to pose, as a man with a history, or to hug a useless regret—that he had ever come near being something more to the captivating young lady than her father's old and faithful friend. That was the right course for him to pursue.

As far as his personal appearance went, the Colonel had rarely showed to greater advantage than he did on this occasion. The fighting light had come into his blue eyes, and his jaw was set and square. Strong emotion, in some men, produces a singular effect of youth. It refines and chastens the face. Philip looked some six or eight years under his actual age, as he walked up rapidly through the trellised vines,—whose young leaves, where the waning moonlight touched them, seemed set in a tiny rim of silver.

By following a narrow path across the vineyards you avoid the many zig-zags of the carriage road. This path comes out on the right, at the foot of the terrace on which the house stands; and, passing along close under the wall of masonry, joins the main road some twenty yards further on, at the bottom of the final ascent.

As Colonel Enderby reached the end of the path and turned along under the wall, he heard voices on the terrace immediately above him. He could not see the speakers, owing to their position, and the intervening screen of leaves.

"I believe he was always a very well-meaning young man, not good-looking, and not very sharp, you know. We saw a great deal of him at one time, more, in fact, than I really wished—not that I want to say a word against him, pray understand that; he was perfectly inoffensive."

Philip received a slight shock. The voice—a woman's—had something alternately aggressive and wheedling in the tones of it, which struck him as unpleasant, yet dimly familiar.

"I think it must be the same," he heard Mr. Ames answer; there was no mistaking his soft utterance. "The description tallies admirably, except in one particular."

"What particular?"—this sharply by the woman.

"He is sometimes a little offensive now, at least to me, dear aunt. But people must develop, you know, in twenty years. He is still not very sharp, as you put it; and he is eminently respectable."

Philip walked on quickly out of hearing. He had an instinct that the foregoing conversation concerned him nearly. Taken all round, it was not a flattering piece of criticism; still, he derived a positive, if unchristian, satisfaction from the knowledge that he was offensive at times to Mr. Ames. But that woman's voice? He could not fit a name or personality to it, yet he became momentarily more and more convinced that he remembered it very well.

He walked fast along the vineyard path, cutting impatiently at the straggling weeds by the side of it as he did so, and then turned to the right up the carriage road. The steep slope of the ground compelled him to slacken his pace.

Frogs were croaking and barking up at the old reservoir, among the tall green canes in the gulley on the left, and the sharp metallic note of the locusts came from the rose bushes; but Colonel Enderby, with all his love of nature, was not in the right humour to find pleasure in these things. His pride rebelled against the false position in which he found himself. The fact of having overheard something not intended for his ears was intensely annoying to him. That woman's voice troubled him. All the uncomfortable side of life at the Villa Mortelli, which had begun to pass out of the range of his vision during the last ten days, rushed into the foreground again, with obtrusive distinctness. The lines of duty and wisdom had showed plain enough when he left Terzia some half-hour ago; but now they seemed to grow confused and blurred. He felt suspicious, vaguely disturbed. This movement of suspicion extended itself even to the beautiful night. The grasshopper became a burden, the frogs with their everlasting clatter an absolute nuisance. The scent of the orange trees, wafted down on the soft wind from the garden beyond the house, was sickly in its sweetness. There was a magical influence abroad to-night, as baffling and perplexing as the dim sense of familiarity which that woman's voice had evoked.

At the top of the hill Colonel Enderby paused. The scene before him was a quaint and fantastic one. The usually sober little villa seemed, for once, to have put on a gala dress. The terrace stretched away bathed in pale moonlight, save where a broad shaft of more positive and yellower light streamed out across it from the hall door. The garden was gay with a number of little, coloured, paper lanterns, swaying gently in the breeze, and

showing here and there, in high relief, the blossoms and foliage of the adjacent shrubs, with spaces of dusky shadow in between. From the garden came a sound of voices.

But that which specially arrested Colonel Enderby's attention was a pair of white figures on the terrace, directly in front of him —one that of a girl, the other of a child some five or six years old. The two were playing together, running lightly to and fro, laughing and calling to each other in tones fresh and clear as bird-notes. There was a weird unearthly effect in these pale flitting figures. For a few seconds, crossing the shaft of light streaming out from the doorway, they would become materialized, honest flesh and blood; then stepping back into the moonlight again, they instantly regained a vague ethereal character.

Philip hesitated; he stood still watching them. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to know exactly how to act. He could not bring himself to walk up calmly to the young lady in the midst of her mystic evolutions, and greet her with some stereotyped remark upon the state of the weather. His taste made him recoil instinctively from so very unimaginative a mode of procedure. And there was something more restraining than mere good taste in Philip just now. He was in that heightened state of moral and emotional consciousness, in which conventional ways of conducting one's self are quite the least easy or obvious. Seeing Jessie again in the light of the confession he had so lately made to himself, the poor Colonel was almost painfully aware how much she was to him; how delightful he found her presence; what a tender and yet penetrating value her every look and action had for him; how terribly sweet it would be to take her in his arms, to hold and keep her for ever next his heart. And yet as she laughed with merry, meaningless laughter, and ran with light quick footsteps after the laughing child, she seemed cruelly beyond his reach, a creature of some young, far-off, ideal world. Yes, love was indeed working. In Philip the dear, tremulous, delicious heartache had fairly begun, and I, for my part, entirely refuse to pity him. The piteous moment only comes, for each one of us, when that happy pain is cured for ever.

Suddenly the child set off running straight along the terrace, looking back, and calling to the girl behind him as he ran. Catching sight unexpectedly of Colonel Enderby's tall dark figure in front of him, the boy swerved with a shrill cry of fright, and would have fallen headlong, if Philip had not stepped forward and caught him by the arm.

"Look out, my little man," he said kindly, "or we shall have you tumbling on your head."

Jessie paused on hearing the child's cry. She stood still for a moment, and put up one hand, with an instinctive movement to smooth the coils of her fair hair. Then she came forward slowly. The moonlight fell softly upon her straight slender figure. Her head was thrown back, and there was a charming half-defiant smile on her face.

Those desirable blossoms which had shown so thick on Philip's patch of good resolutions wilted and faded curiously at this juncture. The fruit of them, if it ever came to perfection, promised to be a detestably bitter mouthful. He was rapidly passing out of the region in which a man thinks and reasons, into that far more interesting and, also, far more dangerous one in which he merely feels. But he fought gallantly with the rising tide of his own passion. He would go away to-morrow. It would be folly, and more than folly, to ask this mere child to marry him, and yet—yet, how he could have loved her! How gladly he could have consecrated all his life to her service! With what fulness of satisfaction he could have borne her off from this crowded, hot, suggestive Italian land, and watched her nature unfold its full sweetness through the long, still English summer days, amid the broad green country, and in the innocent northern sunshine! He fancied the girl would be far more at home at dear, stately old Basset Darcy than in the sultry artificial glamour of the Villa Mortelli.

All this flashed through Philip's mind as Jessie, in flowing white garments, came forward in the cool moonlight. The garden, with its tawdry coloured lanterns, its fitful murmur of conversation, and tinkle of coffee-cups, lay behind her. She was stepping westward, away from it and all that it implied—away from Bertie Ames and his sub-acid humour, away from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and her dark restless affection, away from unknown ladies with harsh, half-remembered voices, away from that little haunting evil-spirit of a monkey,—away from all that, out towards the freedom and gracious solemnity of the spring night—and towards him.

Colonel Enderby dropped the boy's hand, which had rested in his. He put the child gently away from him, and stood waiting. His eyes were very clear and steady; but there was a certain pain in his expression, as of one to whom a good gift is offered, yet who is constrained, for very delight in it, to refuse to put forth his hand and take it.

The little boy, who did not apparently at all relish this indifference on Philip's part to his own small presence, ran up to Jessie, and pulled at her dress, saying—

"Who is he? What does he want? Don't let us stop playing because of him."

Jessie looked full at the Colonel for a minute, then she bent down towards the upturned face of the child, and said, with her peculiarly clear and detached enunciation—

"Listen, Johnnie, and I will tell you who he is. He is a kind friend, and a famous soldier. He has seen great battles and strange countries. And he never cried when he was a little boy and nearly fell down on the gravel. And," she went on, very softly, "he promised to help me to get away from the little red villa and go to England, but I am afraid he has forgotten all about that."

"I don't want you to go away, Jessie," returned the boy, promptly. Evidently he regarded most things from a personal standpoint. "I want you to stay here and play with me."

Colonel Enderby came up and stood near Jessie. Her words had been wonderfully pleasant to him. She rested one hand on the boy's shoulder, and with the other pushed back the heavy mass of brown hair from his forehead, all the while looking up with something between amusement and appeal at the man standing opposite to her.

Philip felt a quickening of the pulse, and a certain intoxication of the senses such as he had not known for many a long day. He would go—yes, he would go; but still, it was not in human nature to cut short the present moment.

"You still want to get away to England very much, then?" he asked.

"I don't care so much about it to-night," she answered, still passing her hand over the boy's hair, "because I am amused. But to-morrow, or the first day it rains, or Bertie is cross, or Mamma has a headache, I shall want to go as much as ever."

The tide of feeling was rising, rising in Philip; but he struggled with it manfully.

"I have come to-night on purpose to speak to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay on that subject," he said. "I ought to have done so sooner, but the days have slipped by, and I have had no suitable opportunity. I did not forget, all the same."

Jessie looked down and gently patted the child's shoulder.

"I do not fancy you are one of the people who easily forget their promises, Colonel Enderby. I said so just now; I don't quite know why,—but I do not really think it."

Philip took a long breath. He had some difficulty in replying as calmly and unconcernedly as he wished.

"You mustn't speak to me like that, Miss Pierce-Dawnay," he said. "It makes it rather hard for me to say to you that which I came here to say."

Jessie glanced up quickly and attentively.

"I have come to bid you good-bye," he went on doggedly. "I am obliged to leave for Spezia to-morrow."

The necessity of that journey to Spezia had become to Philip, in the last few hours, a formula in which he instinctively took refuge. To him the words held a world of meaning over and above the actual statement.

"It is Mr. Drake," cried the girl. Her expression altered curiously. "I don't care for Mr. Drake."

"Poor Drake!" said Philip. "Ah! I'm afraid there is a good deal more in it than can justly be put down to his account."

"But you will come back again?"

Jessie spoke with a most engaging little air of entreaty.

Colonel Enderby shook his head rather sadly.

"No, I think not," he answered.

The girl turned away, almost petulantly. Her soft white skirts swept against Philip as he stood by her, and stirred the loose gravel, as she moved, with a quick rattling sound. She threw herself forward, leaning her elbows on the low terrace wall, and looked out over the dim vineyards into the deep purple of the night. Her attitude showed very markedly the supple beauty of her figure—the strong delicate line of the back from shoulder to waist, and the graceful curve of her well-set hips under her close-fitting white bodice.

"It is all no use, then," she said. "Mamma will never go to England if you leave her to herself. She will stay, and stay, and stay. I do not know how it is, but I believe when people have been some time in Italy they cannot go away. They are under a spell; they must remain. Mamma is like that. If you leave us we shall stay here always. Don't go, Colonel Enderby," she cried, suddenly standing up and turning to him. "Or if you must go, come back soon again. Everything has been so much pleasanter since you came. Mamma has been delightful to me; we have had no little scenes. And as to Bertie's melancholy, it did not matter; I had some one else to think about."

Jessie spoke very simply and frankly, looking into her companion's face. One thing that helped to make this young lady so truly captivating was an apparent absence of all self-consciousness. There was an effect of straightforwardness in her little speeches which effectually robbed them of coquetry.

As for Philip, he was hard pressed. If there was a strain of egotism in Jessie's regret, he did not very carefully consider it. It was enough that the fair young creature, standing there within a yard of him, begged him not to desert her; told him her days

were pleasanter for his coming; trusted him thus in her beautiful and fearless innocence. The moment was a critical one.

Just then, however, the boy, who had assisted very unwillingly at this interview, in which his small personality seemed to count for so little, lost patience altogether, and broke into open remonstrance.

"Come along, Jessie," he said, pulling at her hand. "Let's come and play. Or else take me to mother. I want to go to mother."

Mr. Bertie Ames came out of the garden. He leant against the gate-post for a few seconds, watching the group at the far end of the terrace, and then sauntered slowly towards them.

"Come along, Jessie, don't you hear? Do come," whined the boy.

The corners of his mouth began to turn down in an ominous fashion.

"Ah! don't cry," she answered quickly. "I do not like children when they cry."

The critical moment was over. Colonel Enderby gathered himself together again. He had been sorely tempted, but he had mastered the temptation. He would be true to the best he could see.

"I will talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said to Jessie. "You will trust me to do my best?"

"Oh yes; as to that, I trust you very fully. But, all the same, we shall stay on here indefinitely if you go away."

"I must go away." Philip spoke gently and gravely, looking very full at her. "I must go for a very simple reason—I dare not stay."

CHAPTER III.

THE JOYS OF REUNION.

"My dear Jessie," Mr. Ames began, languidly, as soon as he was within comfortable speaking distance, "are you disposed to perpetrate an act of virtue, and go and mount guard? Cousin Eleanor is becoming a little nervous; I am quite nervous already. You are eminently welcome, Colonel Enderby," he added, with gracious emphasis. "Some relations of mine have most kindly come to see me to-day. We have not as much in common as one could wish—my fault, of course, I own,—and though family affection goes a long way, and fills up many gaps, conversation now is becoming the least shade difficult. I have

been looking forward to your arrival with longing and hope. Would you come and say something to them? We should all unite in a movement of gratitude unfeigned."

"I shall be very happy to make myself useful," said Philip, stiffly.

He detested Mr. Ames with amazing cordiality at that moment.

"That is so good of you," the other man answered. Then he addressed Jessie, at whom he had glanced more than once while speaking.

"I wonder if you know how extremely becoming that gown is?" he remarked, in a meditative manner.

"It does not much matter whether I know it or not," she replied quickly.

"If other people do, you mean," continued Mr. Ames, still looking at her, and lifting his eyebrows slightly. "Commend me to your fundamental good sense, Jessie. It never deserts you."

"I did not say that," the girl answered, with some warmth.

"Oh no, of course not. If you had, it would have tended to disprove my statement with irritating rapidity. But you leave things to be understood. Your taste is always admirable."

"That is more than can be said of your own, at times, Mr. Ames," broke in the Colonel.

A number of subtle strains of feeling had combined to endanger Philip's self-control. He was bitter, and he lost his temper pretty thoroughly. "That fellow, with his nasty insinuations, will make her as artificial and unbelieving as he is himself," he thought; and then he added, mentally, a certain desire concerning Mr. Ames' future destiny, considerably more vigorous than polite.

Bertie, meanwhile, stared at him with an air of interested surprise.

"Suppose we come into the garden," he said. "Perhaps it would be safer. This spot is exposed; and medical men say that moonlight is dangerous. It affects the intelligence, in some cases. Shall we come?"

Few things are more acutely irritating than that another person should triumphantly retain his suavity of demeanour, when you are conscious of having lost your own. Bertie Ames practised this passive form of torture frequently upon the members of his acquaintance. He entirely refused to be ruffled; he became gentler and more seriously polite and gracious,—that was all. He was perfectly ready to pardon small insolences, and bless those that cursed him; and this not because his spirit was

penetrated with a conviction of the inestimable value of the grace of humility, but simply because it was not worth while to get excited. Men and things were profoundly unsatisfactory; this world is a most unsuccessful speculation, bound to go wrong and prove a bore. To permit yourself to be excited or angry implied that you had expected things to go right, and were proportionately disappointed. It was crude, it was exquisitely foolish to be disappointed; and if there was one thing Mr. Ames dreaded it was being foolish. He did not dread anything else very much. He was under the impression that he had taken the measure of the possible evils which could befall him—he believed he was equal to meeting them. He had not very much, he thought, either to gain or to lose, barring his belief in his own perspicacity. That would be a heavy loss, and an irretrievable one.

As to Colonel Enderby, Bertie had a considerable respect for him. He fancied that he understood the other man's character pretty completely. He knew quite well that Colonel Enderby disliked him; but it would have appeared about as reasonable to Bertie to be annoyed with him on these grounds as to be annoyed with a snail for moving with deliberation, or with a spider for enjoying a diet of flies. People are the result of their circumstances, of inheritance, nationality, education. To be offended with them, poor dears, for what they cannot possibly help, for sympathies and antipathies, none of their choosing and beyond their control, is simply absurd. And so it comes about that a materialist and necessarian creed produces some aspects of the highest Christian endurance and toleration—a really admirably glad suffering of fools, combined with a beautiful absence of any vindictive desire to bray the said fools in mortars, with the professed intention of grinding the folly out of them.

The immediate consequence of Mr. Ames' philosophy on the present occasion, was that he entertained his companion with agreeable conversation as they walked slowly after Jessie and the little boy down the length of the terrace. His face was mild and serious, his manner calm and soothing. He treated the Colonel as one treats a slightly insane patient, who should be agreed with and humoured. Bertie dawdled, loitered, gazed down over the terrace wall at the vineyards and the town below—did his best, in fact, to lengthen out the little walk as much as possible, and completely to engage Colonel Enderby's attention.

Philip's wrath abated under these blandishments. He thought he had been a trifle rough on Mr. Ames. He did not care to emphasize that movement of roughness. He had plenty on

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his hands already, without complicating matters by a brush with this imperturbable young gentleman. He dawdled too, and listened very civilly to Mr. Ames' advice as to the best way of seeing Italy, and other kindred matters, while his eyes followed Jessie's retreating figure with lingering wistfulness.

As they went in at the dilapidated gate of the garden Bertie was saying :—

"You should come for a winter, you know. Florence, for instance, is delightful in winter. And there generally is interesting society there; society that presents a good deal of material to the imagination. Yes, you should see it, Colonel Enderby. You would form an element—perhaps a new one. Society would be obliged to you. By the way, my cousin, Mrs. Farrell, who is here to-night, could tell you a lot about Florence. She was there a good deal a few years ago, before her husband, poor Eugene, died. There were original traits in Eugene's character. Mrs. Farrell had some experiences, I fancy, while she lived in Florence."

Colonel Enderby happened to look full at Bertie Ames as the latter finished speaking. His thoughts had been engaged with somewhat penetrating personal considerations, and he had hardly noticed what the other man had been saying. The two were standing quite near each other in the narrow gateway. Glancing at him suddenly the Colonel was aware of a singular expression about his companion, of an intentness of gaze, as though he was watching him with some distinct purpose.

Bertie Ames put his hand over his eyes for a moment, with an indolent, half-disgusted gesture.

"Dear me," he said, "how vulgar those wretched little lanterns look after the moonlight! and yet Jessie and I were rather pleased with our illumination at first. Even now—though I own it is a lamentable exhibition of the intermittent purity of my taste—I think it has a certain value. It presents a contrast, and there is a great deal to be got out of contrasts. They are very teaching. They make one aware of a number of sensations one might otherwise miss. And at my age I begin to cherish sensations—that is if they are not too vivid."

He moved on as he spoke into the gleaming garden; and then, smiling amiably at Philip, added—

"Talking of contrasts, Colonel Enderby, here is a sufficiently telling one. It is a little unkind to one of the ladies, certainly, but that, alas! is unavoidable. Just look there, at my cousin Jessie Pierce-Dawnay and my cousin Cecilia Farrell, *née* Murray."

Colonel Enderby came a few steps into the garden too. He started, and could hardly repress an exclamation. He was conscious of a sudden luminous concussion in his brain. The solid ground seemed to give a lurch, and then slowly settle itself into place again.

Where the four weedy gravel paths met in the centre of the garden, with the light of a row of swaying lanterns falling fully upon her, Jessie stood, her white figure showing in high relief against a dim multitudinous background of leaves and flowers. She was speaking with considerable vivacity and animation—apparently describing her late game of play. By her side, listening to her clear speech, was a tall, thin, jaded woman, who had undeniably shaken hands with the days of her youth. She wore a plain travelling dress of dark material; and gave the impression of being a tired, careful, over-burdened individual; of having reached a state of mind in which she was indifferent to those small niceties of feminine attire, and was unequal to that prettiness of gesture and manner so important to every woman who retains her natural desire of appearing to advantage in masculine eyes.

As a connecting-link between these two very dissimilar persons stood the little boy—holding the hand of the elder woman, kicking about the gravel with his foot, and putting in a remark from time to time in thin treble tones.

"I hope you have not tired yourself, Jessie," said Mrs. Farrell, with an even colourless utterance. "You have been very kind in amusing Johnnie so long."

Jessie laughed gently. She looked wonderfully sparkling with her fresh face and quick, graceful movements. The emotion she had displayed a short time before, when talking to Colonel Enderby, had apparently passed away, leaving no trace, save perhaps a brighter light in her blue-grey eyes, and a slight vibration in her voice.

"I am hardly ever tired," she answered, "unless I am bored, and then I just go to sleep. Mamma says I am remarkably strong. I am very glad of that. I am not fond of sickness or sick people—it all seems unnatural, you know."

Mrs. Farrell appeared a little bewildered; she drew the boy nearer to her as she replied—

"Sickness may be unnatural. I am sure I don't know. It is very common."

Bertie Ames smiled. He glanced at the two women under the orange trees, and then at Colonel Enderby.

"This contrast interests you?" he inquired.

The Colonel's expression had resolved itself out of simple astonishment into one of considerable resolution. The position was a painful and embarrassing one, but he was determined to carry it through with a high hand.

"I believe I have the honour of knowing that lady," he said, with some dignity of manner. "She has probably forgotten me, though, as it is a long while since we met. I must ask you to mention my name to her, to recall me to her remembrance."

Bertie Ames made a gesture of assent.

"By all means. But here are Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and my worthy aunt, Mrs. Murray, just coming out of that gnat-infested little arbour. Speak to them first. My cousin is not in her happiest mood to-night, I grieve to say, therefore it is advisable to observe formalities."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay did, in fact, sweep up to the two gentlemen in a rather unnecessarily dramatic manner. She shook hands with Philip in silence, and then stepping aside said—

"Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray assures me that you and she are old friends. That was the term, wasn't it?—old friends, Colonel Enderby."

Philip bowed profoundly to a voluminous figure which blocked the archway of the arbour.

"Ah! perhaps Colonel Enderby won't admit the friendship," said the lady, with a large and slightly biting archness of address. "We women remember every little event in our quiet monotonous lives; but with you gentlemen it is so different. A thousand things happen to you, you know, and deaden the old recollections, while we poor things sit at home with our fancy-work, and our memories, and our regrets. Ah! dear me."

Philip felt nettled.

"I too have an excellent memory, I assure you," he said quietly.

"Eh! what?" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, sharply.

Then she turned to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with an assumption of great geniality of demeanour.

"We have always watched Colonel Enderby's career with so much interest, you know. The papers have not been silent. They have given us information—very deeply interesting information at times. I have often said to Cecilia, 'I wonder if we shall ever meet Colonel Enderby again?' And now that it should come about through you, my dear Bertie, in this unexpected way, really, you know, it is very, very singular."

The smile which accompanied these words revealed a remarkably even and glittering set of teeth. Mrs. Murray was an old

woman; but she was extremely well preserved, almost too well preserved, perhaps. She was stout, high-coloured, and completely mistress, apparently, both of herself and of the situation.

"My dear aunt, what greater happiness can befall my unworthy self than to give you pleasure? Giving is more blessed than receiving, you know. But in this case the blessing seems to ricochet somehow; and in the giving, I too am sensible of receiving, in a measure."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked rather hard at the young man.

"Bertie," she said quickly, "you are talking nonsense. Come," she added, addressing the Colonel, "come and speak to Mrs. Farrell."

Philip found himself bowing again stiffly—mechanically. He had a vision of a pale, worn, anxious woman's face; and was aware of a strange tightening sensation about the muscles of his throat as he tried to deliver himself of a civil and appropriate greeting. The last time he had seen this woman she was pretty and young; he had loved her devotedly; he had kissed her at parting! It seemed cruelly malicious on the part of circumstance that he should meet her again on this day of all days in his life, when the cherished sentiment of years had fairly died out into grey ashes, and the clear, intense flame of a growing passion was quickening the deep places of his heart.

For a perceptible space of time after Philip's introduction to Mrs. Farrell there was a silence. No one seemed disposed to take the initiative. Then Mrs. Murray began to repeat, with an air of being quite determined to say something, her former phrases about the lapse of time, the unfailing memory of woman, the interest excited in her mind by Colonel Enderby's career, and the strange and agreeable chance of this encounter.

"I wonder," remarked Mr. Ames, gently, "how far one really enjoys meeting old friends. Sometimes it strikes me that there is a grain of conventionality in one's expression of satisfaction. I dare say I am peculiar in the matter, but I find the sight of old friends rarely fills me with unmitigated rapture. You are fond of subtleties of this kind; what do you think about it, cousin Nell?"

"Hadn't we better go down to the hotel?" broke in Mrs. Farrell, speaking hurriedly to her mother. Her face was burning painfully; and that, alas! did not improve her personal appearance. "It is getting very late for Johnnie; and we haven't seen our rooms yet, you know."

"Why do you squash my hand so tight, mother?" asked the little boy, fretfully. "You hurt me."

"I too think Johnnie would be better in bed," said Mrs.

Pierce-Dawnay, suddenly. There was rather a dangerous light in her eyes.

"It is some way down to the town," Cecilia went on. "I think we had better start soon."

"We shall see you again, Colonel Enderby," said Mrs. Murray, with much warmth of manner. "I understand you are staying at Terzia."

"Unfortunately, I leave to-morrow," he answered. "But I will give myself the pleasure of calling on you in the morning, if I may."

Directly he had spoken, Philip was aware of having somehow committed an indiscretion. Bertie Ames said "Ah!" softly, under his breath; and Eleanor rustled suggestively.

"Dear me, I am so sorry. I thought, from my nephew's account, you would be here for some time longer. Well, well," Mrs. Murray went on, shaking one fat hand, with its multiplicity of jangling bracelets, at him playfully, "we shall see—we shall see. Perhaps we may make you change your mind, you know, notwithstanding all that good-for-nothing Bertie's sarcasms about old friends."

Then the excellent lady, with many expressions of affection and gratitude for the most delightful of evenings, took leave of her hostess.

"Jessie, go indoors with them," said her step-mother. "See that Mrs. Murray has her cloak and things. You will pardon my remaining here," she continued, turning to Cecilia. "Bertie, you will take care of your aunt. Antonio can go too, you know, and carry the child."

As Jessie obediently followed in the wake of her step-mother's guests, she passed very close to Philip Enderby. Moved by a momentary feeling, she stopped and looked up at him, with a strange mixture of anger and entreaty in her charming face.

"It is no good, then; you are obdurate, you still mean to go," she said quickly. "I must prepare myself to remain for ever at the little red villa. I make you my curtsy, Colonel Enderby. I have been deceived in you."

The words cut Philip to the quick. The whole meaning and purpose of the man rushed together in one clear, overmastering impulse. He stretched out his arms to grasp and keep her.

"Ah, Jessie," he said—"Jessie, I can't part with you like this."

But the girl neither heard nor heeded him. Having delivered her soul of its burden of resentment, she turned and fled. He saw her pale figure drift swiftly across the semi-darkness of the terrace, flash into clearness for an instant in the yellow light of

the doorway, and then disappear within the house. To follow her was impossible; it meant coming face to face with that painfully playful old person, Mrs. Murray; it meant making a confession which reason and sentiment alike condemned. He took a long breath; set his teeth; and went back to seal his fate by speaking to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

That lady, meanwhile, had, perhaps fortunately, been too self-occupied to take any note of the little scene between her step-daughter and her guest. She was suffering an *accés* of nervous irritation. She had flung herself down in a wicker-chair beside the table, with its half-empty coffee-cups, and as Colonel Enderby came up to her she broke out into vehement protest.

"Heaven help us, but what a woman! She is the most abominable old vulgarian. She sets every tooth in my head on edge, and her insinuations are little short of an insult. There is a *mauvaise langue*, if you like! Wretched Cecilia to have such a mother! And really it is too vexatious that Miss Keat should be away just now; it is—— Ah! well—but, Colonel Enderby, tell me, what on earth has made you decide to rush off to Spezia like this, at an hour's notice?"

As she ceased speaking, Eleanor raised her eyes to Philip's face. Something in his appearance arrested her attention. He stood still, almost rigid, before her; yet there was a singular intensity and concentration of purpose about him.

The answer to her question came promptly enough.

"You must pardon me, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; I cannot give you my reasons for going away. But they are imperative, believe me, all the same."

Her forehead contracted into a frown, half annoyance and half thought.

"I do not understand you."

"I understand myself only too well," answered the Colonel, not without a grain of bitterness.

A sound of footsteps and voices came from the direction of the house. The guests were departing. Then Parker, tall and angular, stalked into the garden.

"If you're going to stay out here, ma'am, any longer," she said, "you must put more on. Mr. Ames sent out this cloak. I meant to bring one out myself, anyway."

Parker's manner towards her mistress was not weighted with any superabundance of ceremony. Their acquaintance dated from the days of sensible nurse and more or less spoilt child, and a savour of that relation survived between them still. Eleanor submitted very readily to have the cloak wrapped about her.

"I suppose I can put out those lantern things?" Parker went on.

"Oh, leave that to Antonio. You can't reach them," answered Eleanor.

The worthy waiting-woman smiled grimly. "I can reach them just as well as Antonio. And he won't be back for the best part of an hour. The candles are burnt right down; they'll set fire to the paper before long."

"Oh, do as you like; you always have your own way in the end, you know."

With that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got up.

"Come on to the terrace," she said to Colonel Enderby. "Tell me," she added, as they moved away, "are your reasons for going connected in any way with the people you met here to-night?"

"No, I had decided to go before I saw your guests this evening. I had already mentioned the fact to your daughter."

Eleanor leaned against the low terrace wall.

"This is all very abrupt," she said.

In the garden Parker extinguished the coloured lights one by one. There was something rather fateful about her tall, gaunt form. It was difficult to believe that the harsh-featured, bony woman did not derive a cruel satisfaction from cutting short the pretty, frivolous, superfluous brilliance of those swaying lights.

Philip watched her in silence for a moment, then he spoke simply and earnestly. The fact that he was sternly putting out all his own gay-coloured hopes, just as Parker yonder was putting out the gay-coloured lanterns, lent a penetrating quality, a ring of simple eloquence to his speech. He alluded to their former conversation; he reminded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that she had asked his advice — now he gave it. She had spoken of her step-daughter's future—let her take the young girl home to England, to her own country and kindred, and find a worthy suitor for her there. "Foreigners and half foreigners," he said, "seem to me likely to make very poor sort of husbands." For her own peace of mind, as well as for Jessie's welfare, he urged her to go, and go soon,—to renew intercourse with her own and her husband's relations, to pick up the threads of English life again.

Eleanor listened quietly. When he had finished, she spoke with an air of abstraction.

"That is what you advise, then?"

"Yes, that is what I advise. I have thought the matter over as carefully as I know how. That is what you ought to do."

Eleanor raised her shoulders irritably.

"Oh, you are mistaken—mistaken," she exclaimed.

"No, I am not—I wish I was mistaken," said the Colonel, sadly. "I have found the last fortnight very pleasant, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; it is not to please myself that I go away."

He wanted to enlarge on this text and make a civil speech; but somehow the words stuck in his throat—the speech refused to come off.

Eleanor shook hands with him in silence; then, when he had got a few steps away, she called after him.

"You do not start early to-morrow?"

Colonel Enderby turned back.

"I shall go by the mid-day train," he answered.

At the end of the terrace he took a last look at the Villa Mortelli. The moon had set some while before. The house loomed up a black shapeless mass, with a window here and there gleaming faintly from light within. The frogs and cicalas had concluded their long concert. Only the muffled roar of the surf sounded up from the beach, and the night wind whispered and rustled among the stiff leaves of the old ilex trees at the near end of the upper vineyard path. Far below, the lights of the town twinkled amid the rich purple obscurity of the night. To Colonel Enderby the last fortnight seemed of the substance of a dream, ethereal, unsubstantial. The pretty play was played out; the curtain had come down; the spectacle was over; the common work-a-day world claimed him as its own once more. He believed, at that moment, that he had said good-bye for ever to all extravagance, whether of joy or sorrow. Wife, child, home—those eternal sources both of purest pleasure and keenest pain, were not for him. He would go away; go back to his soldiering. It had consoled him long ago, perhaps it would contrive to console him again. He thought, with a species of ascetic satisfaction, of the innumerable rows of black huts at Aldershot, of the unlovely barrack buildings and the church crowning the rising ground, of the bare drab waste of the Long Valley, with its encircling ranges of sombre fir-trees and stretches of dark heather.

Henceforth, as far as love and pretty young girls went, he would honestly accept his age and disabilities; he would put that side of things away for ever, and patiently submit to consider himself shelved in questions of the affections.

"Upon my word, though," he said to himself while walking along the narrow street of Terzia, between the tall frowning houses—"upon my word, I have had a pretty hard day of it."

Just then Mr. Ames, slim, a shade over-dressed, and with an air of exquisite suavity, met him.

"Ah! good-night, Colonel Enderby," he said. "Is it true that we have the misfortune of losing you so soon? Still, notwithstanding the prospect of parting, I own I am a happy man to-night. I have the heart of a child. I revel in the possession of a clear conscience. After all, what pleasure is comparable to a sense of accomplished duty?"

Lifting his hat, he passed on, without waiting for any answer.

Philip Enderby had a momentary longing to find himself opposite to Mr. Ames at a distance of twenty paces, with accessories in the form of pistols, seconds, and a surgeon. It made the fact of his renunciation none the easier, that he left that enigmatical young gentleman behind him in full possession at the Villa Mortelli.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AMES FINDS HIMSELF UNEQUAL TO THE OCCASION.

WHEN she parted with Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was in a somewhat excited frame of mind. Like many persons of apparently strong will and strong character, she had at bottom a great necessity for moral support; she was, in truth, extremely dependent. She found it impossible to keep things to herself; she was compelled to overflow, so to speak. Very often she made most compromising mistakes by overflowing to quite the wrong person.

She went indoors, and upstairs into the drawing-room, which looked depressing and ghostly in the feeble light of a pair of candles set on the piano. Jessie had been playing earlier in the evening. Some loose music was scattered about, and a little bouquet of flowers, which Bertie had given the girl when she came down dressed for dinner, lay fading on the turned-back lid above the key-board. Eleanor regarded these indications of her pretty step-daughter's late presence without any very warm signs of maternal or even step-maternal tenderness. In point of fact, they appeared to aggravate rather than modify her former agitation. She clasped her well-shaped hands together with strong impatient gesture, and began to pace backwards and forwards up and down the whole length of the long room, her black lace mantilla swaying with the alternate drooping and half-angry raising of her head, while the heavy train of her black silk dress made a rasping noise as it dragged over the marble floor.

Mr. Ames came in, after a while, and came in, too, in a charming humour. He even went so far as to hum a few bars

from one of Mephistopheles' merry evil-sounding songs in "Faust" as he came upstairs.

"Ah! dear cousin Nell, you are still up. This is an unexpected bit of good fortune. Let us talk."

Eleanor glanced at him from under her dark eyebrows. Her nostrils dilated slightly. She looked like a well-bred horse which lays back its ears, half in nervousness and half in viciousness.

"I will sit down, if you don't mind," Bertie continued. "I am slightly exhausted. I see you are walking off the effects of my dear aunt Mrs. Murray's society. It needs walking off, I admit. Don't let me interfere with that salutary process. We can talk just as well so."

"She is a detestable old woman," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay over her shoulder, as she swept up the room again.

"Ah! there you overshoot the mark," he answered, in a mildly argumentative tone. "She is not detestable; she is only powerful. You are rather powerful too, you know, Eleanor, at times. And two powerful women rarely get on quite happily together. But I am really sorry for my aunt all the same. She compassed sea and land to make good marriages for her daughters, and now all their highly desirable husbands refuse to have anything to do with her. She has had to fall back on Cecilia. Cecilia has a positive genius for doing her duty."

"I always have thought Cecilia more or less of a fool," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay incisively.

"Yes; but she is a good fool; and that is more or less of a good thing. To-night I love her dearly. She completely routed our valiant Colonel."

Eleanor stopped abruptly in her agitated walk.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

Bertie Ames leant back in his chair, rested his elbows on the arms of it, and pressed the tips of his fingers together, with the air of a man who is full of a gracious sense of well-being.

"It was truly refreshing," he said. "It was just one of those delicate little episodes that make life more than endurable for a short period. I guessed a good deal from certain things which my aunt said when we first mentioned Enderby's name. I ascertained that they had not met since the balmy days of youth, and that at that remote epoch he had been seriously smitten with Cecilia. Cecilia had also entertained tender feelings towards him, prior, of course, to her connection with that plausible scapegrace, Farrell. I was grieved to inflict any discomfort on her, poor dear soul; but what would you have? One can't too closely consider everybody."

Eleanor walked on again. Her head was bent; she looked anything but delighted at this little narrative.

"I was sweeter than honey and butter to the Colonel, who, on his part, was not quite as civil as he might have been to me. But I bided my time. I arranged a delicate revenge."

"Revenge?" she interrupted sharply. "Why, what quarrel have you with Colonel Enderby?"

"Oh, no personal quarrel, I assure you. He has the liveliest contempt for me; but I don't mind that—it is a mere matter of temperament. He can no more help it than that nameless but historic person, of whom we used to be told in our youth, could help his head swelling when he eat gooseberries. I revenged not so much my wretched self, dear cousin Nell, as all unsuccessful, unrespectable, vagabond humanity. I have a large share of those primitive instincts of fallen man which make dirty, worthless, little boys, in the gutter, throw a handful of mud at the nice, clean, well-conducted little boys who roll by them, sitting up in well-appointed carriages. I planned a telling scene. I let the sight of Cecilia burst upon our friend as she was standing talking to Jessie under the orange trees. You can picture the contrast."—Bertie Ames laughed softly to himself. "It was dramatic. The poor Colonel really behaved very well. But, to use a vulgar phrase, it knocked the wind out of him for a few seconds very effectually."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was at the far end of the room. She spoke with a trace of hesitancy.

"No doubt he felt seeing Cecilia again, under the circumstances. But—I suppose I am stupid—I confess I don't quite catch the point of the contrast with Jessie."

"Heaven help us, Eleanor, where are your eyes?" cried Mr. Ames, holding up his hands. "Why, poor man, to put it coarsely, he is simply over head and ears in love with Jessie!"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay came slowly down the length of the room. Again she had that appearance of laying back her ears, and showing the whites of her eyes. As she passed the young man, she said, with something rather forced in the calm of her manner—

"Ah, you think so too, do you? I am glad of that."

There was a moment's silence.

"I don't think that is quite kind of you, cousin Nell," he observed. "Has not Jessie had plenty of victims already? I merely perpetrated a passing practical joke. You go farther, it seems, and with no fair cause. Why should you want the poor man to be tortured?"

"I don't want him to be tortured," she answered, keeping her

eyes fixed on the floor. "I have the highest regard for Colonel Enderby. I desire earnestly to secure his happiness."

Bertie Ames remained very still. The air of enjoyment had pretty well died out of his face.

"Pardon me," he said, "but would you mind sitting down, Eleanor? The scraping of your dress is getting a little on to my nerves. It confuses me. I confess, for example, I don't clearly apprehend the meaning of your last speech."

As he spoke Mr. Ames looked very full at his companion.

Strong as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay might appear, this man certainly exercised a remarkable influence over her. She knew quite well that the die was cast, and that a dangerous and painful scene lay before her—how dangerous and painful it might prove she could not as yet determine; but that it would tax her courage and fortitude pretty severely she was already sure. In her present state of hardly repressed excitement, it would be far easier to her to say what must be said moving to and fro. Yet when Mr. Ames looked steadily at her, and pointed to the sofa opposite to him, she wavered only for a moment, and then sat down.

"That is better," he murmured. "I am idiotic, no doubt, but I repeat, I do not clearly understand what you mean."

Eleanor leant back among the large sofa-cushions. Movement and feeling had brought a glow of colour into her cheeks. In her rich elaborate black gown, with the soft lace falling back from her dusky hair, she was undoubtedly a strikingly handsome and distinguished-looking woman. Physically she gave way before her companion, a nervous tremor shook her; but mentally she hardened herself against his influence. She half shut her eyes, and clasped her hands tightly together as they lay on her lap.

"I intend to encourage Colonel Enderby," she said slowly. "To be quite frank with you, I wish to secure Jessie's future, and I believe that he would make her an admirable husband."

Bertie Ames did not move; but he turned very pale indeed.

"Ah!" he said, with a queer shuddering intonation. It was something like the cry of an animal in pain.

Eleanor sat up quickly. She raised her hands and tore open the lace at her throat. She wanted air, she felt as though she would stifle. It was dreadful to her to see this man suffer—but it was almost equally dreadful to perceive why he suffered.

"Don't take it like that, Bertie," she cried, with sudden violence. "It is hideous. You will drive me mad."

Bertie Ames hardly heeded her outburst. He smiled a little. Eleanor covered her eyes. His poor white face and that pitiful mockery of a smile turned her faint.

"I understand perfectly well now, thank you, Nell," he said gently. "I flattered myself I was prepared for most things; but one's imagination, I observe, has a habit of just missing what is most probable. One's philosophy, too, fails at critical moments. It enables one to bear imaginary evils perfectly well. It is not so successful with real evils. Well, I own myself beaten. You are the cleverer of the two by a very long way. I had not thought of this combination. Jessie's future demands a victim, of course—but I am to be tortured this time, I see, not Colonel Enderby."

"What could I do?" she exclaimed. "I have suspected—feared how things were going with you; but I did not dream it had gone as far as this. And then," she added, with a sort of gasp, "it may come to nothing, after all."

"I don't think so," the young man answered, with that same wretched smile. "Everything will turn out as you wish—at least, if you keep on."

"I must keep on," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She threw back her head; her face was hard and set. Then almost immediately she softened again into a tone of pleading, with a wild longing to justify herself, to prove that her motives were commendable.

"I do it for the best, Bertie. I believe it is right. It seems the safest thing I can do for the child. And who can care for her happiness as nearly as I? Am I not, after all, practically her mother?—mustn't I know best?—mustn't I be most capable of judging? Do you think I could be so base and faithless as to do this thing lightly or thoughtlessly? I have prayed, I have prayed over it—God wouldn't be so cruel as to let me make a mistake? I have implored for guidance."

Mr. Ames laughed. It was not an agreeable laugh exactly.

"Oh! in that case, I, of course, have nothing further to say. If the Higher Powers have been duly consulted, persons such as I am are out of it, clearly. Still you may pity me just a little, cousin Nell," he went on. "It was my last hope. I hardly allowed that it amounted to a hope even. It was the remotest of chances; but just a chance still. Jessie is so young. I fancied, perhaps, the luck would turn; that something might possibly happen if we could only wait."

Eleanor's expression hardened again perceptibly. If he suffered, at least she suffered too.

"Really," he said, after a minute or two, "my position is a singularly graceful one, now I come to think of it. I have been cherishing a secret desire during the last few months for nothing less than the death of a woman I adored for years—a woman who

gave me all she had to give." Bertie paused. "Now the news that she has developed some fatal malady would give me—well, not unmixed pain. Isn't that charming?"

"You make yourself out far worse than you are," she interrupted.

"No, I think not. I appear to be a very despicable animal, and let me at least be honest and admit it. The best thing about me has been my faithfulness to the memory of what was, in itself, a far from pretty thing—Enderby, for instance, would cover it by a very ugly word. But even that last shred of honourable feeling has worn uncommonly threadbare in the past twelve months."

"Jessie would not make you happy," said Eleanor, hoarsely. "I have watched her from babyhood. There are strange wants in her nature."

"Ah! if I am to wait for a wife till I find a faultless woman, I shall wait through all eternity," he responded. "'One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.'"

"Where did you get that abominable sentiment from?" demanded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

"Out of that very acute book, the Bible, cousin Nell. They are the words of a person who is reputed to have had a pretty wide experience of women. My French novels, that you sometimes gird at, say the same thing, only they put it in less conventional language. I am as well aware of Jessie's peculiarities as you are; but I should understand her. I should never ask of her what she could not give. I should be contented with very little—from Jessie."

"You would quarrel," she said bitterly.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a way husbands and wives have. Everybody knows that. Still, that knowledge has never lowered the marriage returns very sensibly yet, I believe."

Eleanor flung herself back against the sofa-cushions. "He loves her—he loves her," she repeated to herself, and the words stabbed her as she said them.

Mr. Ames got up; he came across to the sofa and sat down by his cousin. His face was very pale still—it looked ghastly with his black beard and great, sad, dark eyes—but he had regained much of his usual indolent manner.

"Come, let us talk over this matter reasonably, Eleanor, without any heroics. We both admit that Jessie has certain peculiarities which may prove difficult to deal with. A man will have to pay a certain penalty for loving her."

"Colonel Enderby will love her too well to be conscious of the penalty," she interrupted.

"At first, yes. But remember he is five and twenty years older than she is, at least, and he has lived in an utterly different world to hers. He will worship her, he will be incapable of looking at her from a common-sense point of view—looking at her as she really is. He will make her into an idol. Some day something will happen which makes a demand upon her. She will fail him. He is a fine fellow, in a way, though a stupid one. He will blame himself, and forgive her. It will happen a second time. And then shall I tell you what he will do? He'll just quietly go and blow his brains out. The man is incapable of adjusting himself, he moves all of a piece. He is a rigid English Puritan, you know, at bottom."

"You don't mean to insinuate anything against Jessie?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, her eyes blazing with a sudden burst of jealousy for the girl's honour.

"Heaven forbid! Jessie will never commit any of those indiscretions that society judges very harshly."

There was a silence: then Bertie Ames bent towards his cousin and looked at her very steadily.

"What are you going to do—let him go away to-morrow?"

She looked back at him with an expression of passionate anguish and despair in her handsome face.

"He must go if he will. But I shall make him distinctly understand my wishes as to Jessie's future first."

Bertie placed his hand on Eleanor's two hands as they lay clasped in her lap. The hot colour rushed into her face, she closed her eyes with a swift shiver, which trembled all through her frame.

"Nell," he said softly, "think a moment. Are you quite determined?"

"Yes, yes," she cried wildly, shaking off his hand. "Utterly determined; irrevocably determined. Jessie must go—she must go. It must be done at once."

"Very well," he answered.

Then he got up slowly from the sofa.

"It is very late," he went on. "You had better go to bed. Shall I get you a candle?"

"Bertie, Bertie," cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay in desperation, stretching out her hands to him, "for God's sake, don't hate me!"

"Oh! my dear, I don't hate you," he replied wearily. "You have been wonderfully kind to me, and have borne with me with a great deal of patience at times when I must have been anything but pleasant company. It would be detestably ungrateful to hate you. No, I haven't fallen into that depth yet. And perhaps you

are right; perhaps it is all, as you say, for the best. Only it is a little difficult for me to take an optimist's view of the matter just at present. I can't help thinking of myself first, you know. It is a tendency inherent in human nature; we all have it in our degree, saints and sinners alike."

He looked down on the ground, and shrugged his shoulders in a lazy hopeless sort of fashion.

"I think, sometimes, I am like a living man bound to a corpse. It is not a graceful metaphor, but it just expresses my sensations. Lately I have had an insane hope of getting free from the corpse; but I tied the cords myself, and I tied them a little too cleverly. I shall never get free—never. That makes a man a trifle irritable at times." He glanced up at her suddenly, with a lifting of the eyebrows and a short laugh. "I and the corpse always," he said, "right on to the end—and then beyond, probably blank darkness and nothing. Delightful company, isn't it? Cheering prospect for a healthy man of three and thirty?"

There were noble impulses in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. She had a movement of reckless magnanimity.

"Your sense of honour is overstrained," she said, and as she spoke, no thought of self was present to her mind. "It is false. Go away, Bertie; go away out of this beautiful baleful country, which bewitches and perverts us all—go away and begin over again."

She had risen to her feet. She looked almost majestic in her dark stormy beauty, standing there in front of him.

In how far the young man had realized the nature of her feelings towards himself, I cannot say. That he had a suspicion of them is pretty certain; for it is impossible that a woman should love a man deeply without betraying herself to him in a thousand little ways. But Bertie Ames was not without gracious and respectful sentiments towards certain persons, notwithstanding his cynicism, real or affected. He had avoided examining his cousin's feelings on that special point very discreetly and modestly. At this moment, however, he was guilty of an act of cruelty; but then, in extenuation of that act, it must be allowed, poor fellow, that he was very sore at heart. To Eleanor's magnanimous outburst, he answered, smiling—

"That is all very well, but I am not fond of solitary journeys. A new heaven and earth seem to demand an Eve as well as an Adam. Who shall go forth with me?—Jessie?"

Eleanor shrank back as if he had struck her. The glow of generous enthusiasm died out of her face, leaving it thin and haggard. She had to steady herself with her hands on the arm of the sofa.

"I beg your pardon," he resumed hastily, filled with sudden compunction. "I forgot myself; I oughtn't to have said that. But don't, for Heaven's sake, turn devil's advocate and tempt me. You know just as well as I do that that sense of honour—call it false and overstrained if you will—is the one thing that keeps me from going utterly to the bad, and gives me some kind of self-respect. Without it I should be worth nothing at all; I am worth little enough as it is. I may be superstitious; but I don't much fancy any fresh start would be very successful which began with the throwing of that poor old rag of honour overboard."

Eleanor was silent. Bertie went across the room, lighted one of the chamber candles standing on the consol-table by the door, and brought it to her. Small everyday needs must be supplied, and small civilities complied with, even when poor human hearts are torn and bleeding. The outward decencies of civilization take no note of the more intimate emotions.

As Mr. Ames gave his cousin her candle, and the light of it fell upon her face, he was moved with compassion towards her.

"You look terribly tired, Eleanor," he said kindly.

His friendly solicitude was, perhaps, even harder to bear than his indifference. Eleanor felt ill; she was chilled through, though the night was warm. She, too, was bound, she feared—bound hard and fast and everlastingly to the corpse of a dead love.

"Yes, I am tired," she answered hopelessly—"tired of my life."

Bertie smiled at her kindly again, and raised his hands with a deprecating gesture.

"So am I, cousin Nell," he said, "abominably tired of it. But you and I are cultivated persons, so we won't take any violent measures to rid ourselves of that fatiguing possession, will we? In face of the blank darkness I alluded to just now, it might be a mistake. We'll leave all such desperate doings to highly respectable barbarians, like our friend the worthy Colonel. Good night. Mind you don't slip on the landing;—the floor is just like ice there, outside."

CHAPTER V.

EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF A NEGATIVE SAINT.

As Mr. Ames had said of her, Cecilia Farrell, *née* Murray, had a positive genius for doing her duty. From this statement it may be gathered that her temperament was neither a conspicuously artistic nor a conspicuously original one. I make the above comment not without a movement of hesitancy and a trembling of the

inner man. For the word Duty has come to be the shibboleth of the virtuous English in so eminent a degree, that any person using it lightly, and with an implication of possible limits to its supreme worth and value, runs the risk of finding himself written down as a somewhat dangerous and disreputable character.

But indeed, the saving grace of Duty has been so belauded, so praised, and insisted upon, that by now it surely must be uplifted above all fear of detraction. It is the pole-star of the Anglo-Saxon night. We all steer by it—or by what we reckon to be it—and demand that others shall steer by it too. It appears to be set far above in the heavens, immovable, everlasting. It is a name to conjure with; a fetish to appease; a city of refuge when argument threatens to fail. And perhaps the most engaging quality about this same idea of duty is, that everybody can look at it from their own point of view, use its power in support of their own cause, invoke the mystic benefit of its name in the most opposite cases. One may even go one step further, and admit frankly that the great practical use of such a recognized watch-word as Duty is that the using of it alone is sufficient, and that, having used it, you are then agreeably free to do what you please. Cerberus has got his sop. Go on your way rejoicing. By the majority, nothing further will be required of you.

Only here and there will you come across some sincere and simple soul, who having been indoctrinated with the conception of Duty, takes it home to his or her heart, and tries faithfully to work it out in daily life—a somewhat silly and innocent proceeding no doubt, grounded on an absence of the powers of observation and generalization. This simplicity of mind, however, is becoming more and more infrequent. It takes its rise in an abnormal development of the conscience; and may be described as a sense of universal obligation towards the disagreeable. It is the occasion of much tyranny in unscrupulous persons, and affords but a limited source of joy to the possessor of it, since he is almost always struggling to conform to a shifting ideal of conduct prescribed by others. It induces a spirit as far away from the strong inward compelling of the artist, or the luminous calm of the philosopher, as anything very well can. It distorts and confuses the reason, and rubs down all the sharp edges of the individuality. It takes away all inspiring sense of freedom, and leaves the poor soul wandering through a dim world, the sport of circumstance, and of many, but most untrustworthy guides.

It may be asserted of Cecilia Farrell, I think, that she belonged to this rare, admirable, and somewhat depressing type of humanity. Her overmastering sense of duty had caused her to be the prey

first of one person, and then of another. It had prevented her abandoning herself freely to any one emotion, it had kept her in a constant attitude of self-restraint and self-repression. Life had been but an attenuated and dust-coloured affair to her. She had habitually come in only for the second best, for meagre satisfactions, and sorrows that were far from being as robust and full-bodied as sorrows should be. Both her pains and pleasures had been set in a low key. Some women would have found a very sufficient opportunity for rich drama in passages of Cecilia's career. But in her case conscience was supreme, and its action was paralyzing. The question of what she ought to feel usurped the position of what she actually did feel, and cast a dreary blight over all her emotions.

And then, the worst of it is, such a woman gets so little sympathy. A half-starved, quiet, inglorious existence, such as Mrs. Farrell's, is simply uninteresting to society at large. People generally referred to her with regretful, almost condemnatory inflection, as "poor Cecilia." Mrs. Farrell knew this; she hardly resented it. As time went on she grew to accept the definition unreservedly. She became "poor Cecilia" to herself; and this not with any lingering of sentimental self-pity. The adjective had still a touch of reprobation in it. She felt that she was very far from being a success; that she was a slightly inconvenient adjunct both to her own and to her husband's families—a person who never had given, or was likely to give, cause for exuberant congratulations.

Duty had dried her girlish tears for young Philip Enderby. It had compelled her, at her mother's desire, to accept Eugene Farrell. To accept not only the honourable prefix to his name, which filled Mrs. Murray with such lively self-glorification, but to accept also his many debts, his uncertain humours, his ceaseless wanderings from one foreign watering-place to another, ostensibly in search of health, actually in search of "play." Duty had made her ignore a very undeniable amount of indifference, neglect, exactingness, if nothing worse, on his part; for Eugene was not a wholly pleasant person to live with. It made her get over the tender sorrow caused by the deaths of two little babies, who, after the briefest experience of the doubtfully joyful life of this planet, decided to leave it for a more peaceful and congenial atmosphere. It made her shed tears for her husband on much the same principle as that which had dried them for her lover long ago. Finally, it made her bow her patient neck under Mrs. Murray's not easy yoke, and obey spiritually, while she supported materially, that well-preserved and still vigorous old woman. As Mrs.

Pierce-Dawnay had said, Cecilia always was more or less of a fool; and as Mr. Ames had replied, she was undoubtedly a good one.

Mrs. Farrell's income had never been large, and her husband's comforts and amusements naturally stood first in the list of necessary expenses. There is something lowering to a woman of gentle birth and refined feeling in struggling with grasping hotel-keepers and foreign servants—whose respect is carefully regulated by the size of your rooms, and the floor on which they are situated. At the time when Cecilia Farrell met Colonel Enderby at the little red villa, her eyes had grown anxious under the many difficulties and provocations of her lot. Her complexion was by no means good; her hair had lost all trace of youthful brightness, and was freely streaked with grey. Her features, always large, had lost the softness of youth, and had become too distinctly emphasized. Her whole face had crystallized into an habitual expression of resigned discomfort—untouched, however, with fretfulness. Many well-bred Englishwomen—and Cecilia could lay claim to very good breeding on her father's side, at all events—present a singular resemblance to young turkey pullets. Mrs. Farrell, with her small head, prominent nose, sloping shoulders, tall flat figure, and general want of generous development, reminded one forcibly of one of those lady-like, but somewhat distressed-looking birds. You recognized the fact that she was a good woman, and what is technically described as a lady; but you had a hankering after the cheerful insolent self-confidence, and finely rounded contours of women, either a little above or a little below her in the social scale.

It has been hinted that Cecilia Farrell's married life was not a conspicuously happy one, and that her husband's conduct towards her left something to be desired; still it is only fair to add that, possibly, the fault was not exclusively on Eugene's side. Cecilia's virtues were not of the order calculated to make her a lively and sparkling companion, and Mr. Farrell was a gentleman of many moods, some of them almost regrettably lively. It is a melancholy admission, yet a less excellent woman would probably have had more power for good over Eugene Farrell. Like so many excellent women, Cecilia's sense of humour was radically defective; she took life hard and anxiously—was almost equally alarmed by her husband's fits of depression and by his fits of gaiety. She soon grew to be an irritation, a weariness, to her light-hearted, mercurial lord and master. She represented all the virtuous, tedious side of life to him. In short, he was horribly bored with her.

One day, sitting in the garden of the *Palais Royal*, some

eighteen months after his marriage, a bright idea came to Eugene Farrell. He had gone through a painful scene with his wife the night before, after making some certainly not very creditable disclosures to her on the subject of recent losses at *rouge et noir*. The summer breeze rustled the leaves of the little plane trees, and made merry with the long ribbon streamers of the *bonnes*' white caps. Dust and miscellaneous shreds of paper whirled up in a purposeless dance off the brown gravel, and then sank to rest again. Eugene Farrell curled up the ends of his fair moustache; watched a nurse struggling with a couple of refractory children; treated a smart young person, with remarkably high-heeled boots, to a somewhat comprehensive stare as she passed in front of him; then smiled and slapped his thigh gently, as though he had arrived at the solution of a difficult problem.

"Cecilia grows inconvenient," he said to himself,—quite good-humouredly. "She shall return to the condition of primitive woman. She has all the makings of a capital beast of burden in her. She shall walk behind, and carry the cooking-pot and the tent-poles."

He went back to his hotel, and began forthwith to put his bright idea into execution. It saved him a world of trouble, it is true; yet it may be questioned whether it made Cecilia a much happier woman, or Eugene a much better man.

It is unnecessary to follow the course of poor Mrs. Farrell's matrimonial infelicities further. Suffice it to say that, inspired by the paramount obligation of duty, she obeyed her husband irreproachably; bewailed him when he departed this life,—clad in the requisite quantity of crape;—and, since the attitude of primitive woman had through habit become so very natural to her, willingly offered herself as beast of burden to her mother and her son.

On the morning following his entertainment by Jessie Pierce-Dawnay, Master Johnnie Farrell demanded that his mother should take him out-of-doors at a comparatively early hour. The nurse, who should have been his companion, was assisting in the mysteries and intricacies of Mrs. Murray's toilette. The boy wanted, he said, to go down to the beach; so Cecilia, of course, prepared herself to comply with his desires.

He was a pretty child, with a round head, bright brown hair, and rather broad features; quick, eager, light-hearted, moody—like his father. His disposition was good, as his doting yet anxious mother told herself twenty times a day. Whether it was likely to be improved by jealous worship and absence of discipline, was a question she did not ask. Probably, at six years old, Eugene Farrell's disposition had been good too.

Johnnie teased to be taken down on to the beach till he got into the hotel garden; and then he suddenly changed his mind. The Grand Hotel at Terzia was new in those days, and its garden was of very simple construction. A square plot of ground, with the hotel buildings round three sides of it, fronting on the street, from which it was divided by high and ornate iron railings. Four large raised beds, planted with palms, and bordered with flowers; a couple of stone fountains on opposite sides, each with two broad basins, the upper one supported by three voracious-looking, open-mouthed dolphins; and for the rest, gravel paths, gas-lamps, and an innumerable company of yellow iron chairs set in long lines, bordering the pathways, and waiting—usually vainly—for occupants. Behind the flat-roofed painted hotel, with its wide balcony, rows of yellow shutters and red and grey awnings, the hills tower up in a quaint conical outline against the deep blue of the sky.

When Mrs. Farrell and her boy came into the garden, it was glary with sunshine, save where the left wing of the buildings cast a sharp-edged blue shadow on the ground. The long leaves of the palms rattled in the wind, alive with the breath of the mountains and the sea. The windows of the restaurant on the ground floor stood wide open. There was an invigorating crispness, sparkle, and freshness in the morning.

Johnnie Farrell, espying the stone basins of the fountains, quite forgot his longing after the beach.

"I say, mother, we'll stay here," he announced authoritatively. "I'll sail boats. It's better for my boats than the sea. Those plaguey old waves are so big, you know; and then, you're always bothering about my getting wet."

Mrs. Farrell dragged a yellow iron chair out of the rank into the cool shade, and sat down submissively. She had tucked up her petticoats pretty high, with the cleanly if ungraceful instinct of an Englishwoman who is going for a walk. She had also put on stout boots, the upper leathers of which were somewhat crumpled across the toes, and a large turned-down hat, surrounded by a forlorn arrangement in green gauze veils. Her circumstances prescribed a black dress, and her natural modesty an over-jacket —both articles somewhat limp in substance and uncertain in cut. In her hand she held a large white covered umbrella, the outward purity of which had suffered considerably from the action of rain, and from contact with various foreign objects. Undoubtedly, at this moment, Mrs. Farrell in appearance realized very completely the modern idea of the pilgrim and sojourner. She looked pre-eminently not at home.

For the best part of ten minutes Johnnie was completely

absorbed in the voyages of his boats across the clear water, under the noses of the vicious-looking dolphins. His mother sat watching him, throwing in a word of warning now and again, as he leaned dangerously far over the curled lip of the stone basin. Moments such as these were quite the happiest of her life. She had her boy all to herself. She was half ashamed of her own delight in watching his neat little figure and active movements. On this particular morning he looked especially engaging in a clean blue-and-white linen suit, and broad-brimmed hat. Cecilia leaned back in her yellow iron chair. Life for the moment was sweet; it was uncomplicated.

But Master Johnnie speedily tired of his boats, and began to search further afield for entertainment.

"I say, mother," he cried out suddenly, "there's the man who was up at Jessie's last night. He's going to have his breakfast in the window just behind you. I shall go and have a talk with him."

Mrs. Farrell's gracious sense of the sweetness of life passed away with a flash.

"No, Johnnie; don't," she answered quite sharply. "I don't wish you to."

The boy stared for a moment at his mother. He was unaccustomed to such peremptory prohibitions.

"Grandmamma says I'm not to talk to waiters, because they are not gentlemen. Isn't he a gentleman?" he inquired, after a moment's reflection.

The high treble notes of the child's voice were very audible, and the open window of the restaurant was directly behind her. Poor Cecilia moved nervously on her chair, and her thin face went crimson.

"Hush, hush!" she answered. "We'll go away now. We'll go down to the beach. You'd like to go down to the beach now, wouldn't you, darling?"

But the darling, unfortunately, was possessed of an inquiring mind.

"I want to know why I mayn't go and talk to that man," he repeated.

He stood in front of Cecilia, with his feet planted well apart, his hat well on the back of his head, and an alarming expression of alertness in his small countenance.

"He seemed to me a very civil sort of fellow," he added, with a little critical air, which would have tickled anybody but his poor mother.

"Be quiet, Johnnie," she said, getting up in a condition of the liveliest embarrassment. "You're very tiresome and naughty."

"No, I'm not," he responded promptly. "It's naughty to wet my feet, and it's naughty to take off my hat in the sun. I haven't done either."

After which concise statement of the moral code, the boy took a few steps to the right, from whence he could command a full view of the window, and the table on which Galli was silently setting out Colonel Enderby's breakfast.

"Hullo, I say; good morning!" he called out to the Colonel, who stood with his back to the window, trying—rather vainly—to interest himself in his letters. "Mother won't tell me why, but she says I oughtn't to speak to you."

"Johnnie, Johnnie, why are you so naughty? Pray, pray don't!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, red, piteous, and distracted.

Philip Enderby had come down to breakfast feeling very far from cheerful. He had, at considerable cost, done what he believed to be right; and yet his mental attitude was by no means self-congratulatory. He was suffering from the moral collapse which almost invariably follows on strong moral effort. He was not so much tempted to regret his past action, to go back on what he had done, as to sink into a state of apathy and indifference. The colour had gone out of life; it had turned dull and leaden, heavy, uninspiring. Yesterday the world had been touched with poetry. To-day the poetry was gone, and everything had become very commonplace and mechanical. Then, too, the prospect of an interview with Mrs. Murray was far from agreeable to him. Philip had not attempted to analyze the sensations produced in his mind by his meeting with Cecilia, but he knew very well that the whole affair was extremely awkward and uncomfortable.

Among his letters was a good-natured gossipy epistle from his sister-in-law, Mrs. Jack Enderby. As he read it, Philip's heart warmed towards his old home and his own country. He believed he was tired of the excitement of the last fortnight; he longed to get back to less intricate and more normal feelings and surroundings. He was in the act of framing an excuse by which, a few days hence, he might dissolve travelling partnership with Mr. Drake—who was awaiting his arrival at Spezia, preparatory to starting for Venice—and journey back to the refreshing monotony of Bassett Darcy, when little Johnnie Farrell's shrill voice caused him to turn suddenly to the window.

"Oh! good morning, young man," he said kindly. He could not help feeling a certain interest in the child. "You are not afraid of me this morning, then?"

"Of course I'm not," answered the boy, with a show of dignity. "I'm not so silly as to be afraid of anything by daylight."

Poor Cecilia, meanwhile, was suffering a small martyrdom. She was embarrassed enough on her own account, added to which she was in a fever of nervousness as to what Master Johnnie might elect to say next. She had moved a little aside, and stood in the full blaze of the pitiless sunshine, helplessly holding her large umbrella, and looking a lamentably distressed and dowdy British female, as Colonel Enderby stepped out on to the gravel, holding out his hand to the little boy.

"That's capital," he said, smiling, "never to be afraid of anything in the daylight."

With the fatal impulse of a very shy person, Mrs. Farrell thereupon rushed wildly into speech.

"Oh! please don't let Johnnie bother you," she began. "You were just going to breakfast; don't let him keep you. We are going down to the sea. It is such a fine morning, that I brought him out early. It was very kind of you to promise to go and see my mother. She will be so glad to see you. She will be ready any time after half-past eleven—at least, I believe she will be ready by then. I am afraid I may not be in; but the number of our sitting-room is ninety-six, on the right—no, on the left, I mean—of the staircase."

Cecilia Farrell undoubtedly presented a sorry spectacle to her former lover. She had not been a very effective person at any time, and a constant carrying of cooking-pots and tent-poles had by no means increased her power of taking the stage well.

Philip Enderby was chivalrous. It pained him to see any woman, and specially this particular woman, at a disadvantage.

"Oh, thanks; I shall find my way," he answered. Then he added, looking good-naturedly down at the pretty boy, "I am sorry I am leaving here to-day. If I had stayed longer this young gentleman and I might have made better acquaintance. I dare say we should find a lot to say to each other. I'm afraid I presented myself to him in rather a disagreeable light last night."

"He was over-excited last night," began Mrs. Farrell, catching wildly at another subject. "He had been playing all the afternoon in the sun. I like spending Sunday quietly. I don't quite approve of going out on Sunday. We might just as well have stayed in Genoa yesterday, and gone to see the Pierce-Dawnays to-day. But my mother wished to go yesterday, and so, of course, I could not object."

She made this confession with admirable simplicity.

As has already been hinted, Colonel Enderby was a little on edge. He gave way to a movement of irritation.

"You still consult other people's inclinations before your own, Mrs. Farrell," he said.

"I say, there's the tram stopping," interrupted Johnnie; "and there's that maid of Jessie's; do you see, mother? I don't like her. She called me a troublesome spoilt baby yesterday. I'm not spoilt, and I'm not a baby, am I now, mother?"

As the boy spoke, Parker descended from the tramcar. The conductor, too, got down off his little platform at the back, and stood aside, waiting politely, as for the passage of some person of recognized distinction. Then Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay emerged from within the vehicle, gave the smiling conductor a royal sort of bow in passing, gathered her black mantle tight down over her handsome bust and shoulders, swept in at the iron gates and up the broad gravel drive, into the middle of the hotel garden.

"Oh, I say, mother, if that maid of Jessie's is coming here, I shan't stay. I shall go down to the beach right slick off, you know."

Master Johnnie Farrell, in the course of his wanderings about the continent of Europe, had acquired a directness of intention and a power of expression decidedly beyond his years.

Eleanor looked extremely well as she walked up the garden. There was an entire indifference to observation, and a certain concentration of purpose in her appearance which was impressive.

"Come along, mother, let's go down to the beach," said the child, pulling petulantly at his mother's stringy skirts.

Eleanor, who was nearly opposite to the group by the restaurant window, suddenly turned her head.

"Ah! you are there!" she exclaimed quickly, coming towards Colonel Enderby.

Her face was pale, almost sallow; her brown eyes seemed sunk, and there were dark circles round them. She looked worn and aged. Mrs. Farrell, with a woman's quick reading of the outward signs of trouble, said to herself wonderingly,—"Why, she has been crying."

"I want to see you at once, Colonel Enderby. I must talk to you. I have something important to say," Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay went on as she came nearer to him. She hardly noticed Cecilia Farrell.

"I say, though, you know, he hasn't had his breakfast yet," remarked the little boy.

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"Ah! that dear child again."

"I am quite at your service," Philip returned courteously.

The lady, he thought, looked capable of developing dangerous

energy if she was kept waiting. He did not care very much about his breakfast just then, neither did he care very much for Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's visit, for that matter. He had delivered his *ultimatum:* he wanted to get away; he did not in the least wish to re-open the question. And what on earth could she want with him? It was a nuisance her surging down upon him in this violent sort of way. But then, everything was a disgusting nuisance this morning. Standing talking, or rather trying to talk, to Mrs. Farrell in the sunshine without his hat was a nuisance of the first water. You will observe that Colonel Enderby was by no means in an heroic frame of mind.

"We'll go, Johnnie," said Cecilia. She was rather sore at heart.

The Colonel's last speech seemed to imply something of a reproach, and she was particularly susceptible to reproaches. She disliked Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay too—chiefly, I imagine, because she was afraid of her. She would get quit of these people, and be alone with her boy.

Parker meanwhile stood a tall black column, in the centre of the hotel garden.

"I must speak to you alone," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. "Parker, go somewhere and sit down and wait. Pah!" she added irritably, "how abominably stupid everybody is to-day. That *enfant terrible* of Mrs. Farrell's is not coming back, I trust? We will go inside here, Colonel Enderby. You can have your breakfast, and I will talk to you. It is simply scorching out-of-doors."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO WAYS OF TRUE LOVE.

MRS. PIERCE-DAWNAY sat down just opposite to Colonel Enderby at the other side of the table on which his breakfast was laid, in the window of the restaurant. She untied the ribbons of her mantle at the neck, and flung it impatiently off her shoulders. She unbuttoned her long *Suède* gloves, and, drawing them off, threw them down on the table before her. She pushed her chair a little back into the soft shadow of the white curtained casement.

"Begin—eat," she said imperatively, looking across at her companion. "I can talk to you just as well so, and it will look more natural if any one passes."

It is all very well to say "Begin—eat;" but how on earth is a man of ordinary sensibility, still more a man suffering a reaction

after considerable mental excitement—how is he calmly to dissect a nicely browned sole, and inquire into the inner mysteries of a hen's egg, when a woman with such an intense and tragic countenance is sitting opposite to and watching him?

"Really," said Colonel Enderby, with a feeling something between amusement and annoyance—"really, I think you would find it more comfortable up in the *salon*. My breakfast can very well wait."

"No," she answered quickly; "I prefer this. Give me a cup of coffee, if you like, to keep up appearances; but go on with your breakfast. I assure you, it will be best."

Philip gave her a cup of coffee, and sat down again. A man with his mouth full of fried fish is at a disadvantage, unquestionably; but then, what could he do?

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was conscious of being a little beside herself. She needed all the support she could get from outside things. This public situation, the unromantic associations of knives and forks, hot rolls, little tables, and all the rest of it, would help her to maintain her self-control. She leant forward and stirred her coffee, speaking all the while rapidly, almost as though reciting a lesson learned by heart.

"You told me you were obliged to go away to-day. You refused to tell me what reasons compelled you to go. I think I have arrived at those reasons. They do great honour to your delicacy of feeling, but they are based upon a mistake. I have come here this morning to entreat you, most earnestly, to reconsider your decision."

Eleanor did not raise her head, but she glanced up at him for a moment, from under her dark eyebrows. The oval of her face was very perfect, as she held her head in this position. Her lips were slightly compressed; but that perhaps only increased the beauty of her mouth. She was evidently trying hard to keep herself in hand. A strange expression in her eyes and the restless action of her hands alone betrayed her inward agitation.

"I should not have trusted to my own opinion in this matter," she continued, without giving Philip time to make any rejoinder; "but another person thinks as I do, and that decided me to come to you. You must remember, I have already warned you that foreign ways are different to English ones—this must be my excuse for speaking to you plainly, and without further circumlocution. We may be in error as to your reasons. In that case, you have only to tell me so. I shall not resent, though I shall certainly regret it."

Eleanor paused. Philip Enderby had laid down his knife and fork; he leant back in his chair. He knew quite well what she

was going to say. Again the queer paralyzing conviction that all this had happened to him before—which had haunted him on the day of his first visit to the Villa Mortelli—took possession of him. It was distressing, yet he could not break away from it. His will seemed in a state of suspension. He must let her speak, and what would happen, happen. He was powerless alike to hasten or prevent the course of events.

"If," said Eleanor, keeping her eyes fixed on the rim of her coffee-cup—"if, Colonel Enderby, you have any peculiar interest in my step-daughter, if you prefer her—— Oh, how shall I put it? If—will you pardon my saying it bluntly?—you are in love with her, don't go away. Stay. You have my leave to do so. There is no man on earth to whom I would more willingly give Jessie than to you."

Philip leant his elbows on the table and covered his face with his hands. All the thwarted yearning, worship, desire, which had left him last night so sad and hungry, rushed into his soul again. He was a strong man; but he shook like a leaf at that moment.

Eleanor sat up. She watched him keenly and anxiously. After a few seconds she spoke again, in the same low voice.

"I have tried, believe me, to do my duty by my husband's child; but a time has come when it would be better, far better, for both of us, that she should pass into stronger and safer keeping than mine. And in whose keeping would she be so safe as in yours —her father's and my best and truest friend? And Jessie, surely, is a very fair trust to offer any man? She is very lovely, and gay, and sweet-tempered. She is very winning; she seems to carry the sunshine itself in her smile. Her charm and brightness are all her own: if she has any faults," Eleanor went on slowly, "they are of my making. I have not always been very wise with her, poor child."

Colonel Enderby looked at his companion as she said these last few words. She sat staring in front of her, and her face was very sad. The growing alienation, all the harshness and bitterness of her feeling towards Jessie, during the past year, rushed into her mind. There had been moments when she had come near absolutely hating the young girl. She was still smarting from her interview of the night before with Bertie Ames. She had come to the Colonel that morning in a storm of jealousy, of revenge, of wounded self-love, and of genuine fear too. She wanted to save Jessie quite as urgently as she wanted to save herself.

Things had reached a pass in which silence and denial were no longer possible to Philip Enderby. He had to face the situation and admit it.

"Tell me, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said at last, gravely and quietly, "can you honestly say that I am a fitting husband for a beautiful girl of twenty? I am eight and forty; every year will make me sensibly older. I have not a large fortune; I have not a distinguished position, or brilliant future to offer a woman. My fighting days are, in all probability, over; younger men, men of the modern school, are crowding forward in my profession, and we old-fashioned soldiers are pretty well out of it, so I have practically no career before me. Dare I, have I any right to, go to a woman, in the first flush of her youth and beauty—she has so much to give—go to her like this, with my hands empty?"

Eleanor turned to him swiftly. Their eyes met. She looked him full in the face.

"If you love her—yes," she said.

Philip Enderby took a long, deep breath. He pushed away his chair and stood up. A necessity for movement was upon him. Just then the glad sea-wind blew back the half-closed shutter of the southern window of the restaurant, and the sunshine streamed in aslant the large light room, flooding the spot where he stood. Something more than sunlight illuminated the Colonel's face at the moment. It was radiant with the flame of a great and beautiful passion. His eyes were misty with tears.

"Love her?" he cried, with a strange, short laugh—"love her? I love her better, God forgive me, than anything in heaven or earth."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay sat still in the shadow. She gathered her mantle hastily up over her shoulders again. She was aware of a sudden chill.

"Jessie is a very fortunate girl," she murmured.

Then she rose and began slowly putting on her gloves.

"You will not go now, I imagine, Colonel Enderby?" she inquired gently, and with, perhaps, a faint spice of malice in her tone.

"I don't know that," he answered; "I cannot say yet. You have been wonderfully good to me. But I must consider it all. It would be too hideous if she sacrificed herself through ignorance—through want of experience. I must wait; I must think it out."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay came a few steps nearer to him. She went on slowly buttoning her gloves. She did not look at Colonel Enderby, but there was a certain vibration in her voice as she spoke, which was curiously penetrating.

"See, I give you the chance of saving three persons from a possible catastrophe. Think twice before you let that chance slip through some quixotic half-morbid imagination about your own

unworthiness. Things cannot go on as they are much longer up at the little red villa. Something will happen." She paused a moment. "I went into Jessie's room as I was going up to bed last night. She lay asleep, with her hands clasped under her pretty curly head. She was smiling, and her breath came as softly as a child's. I looked at her till—till all sorts of wild, wicked——"

"Hush, hush!" cried Philip, sternly. "There are things you may not say, and that I may not hear. There, sit down," he went on, more gently. "You don't quite know what you are saying; you are excited and ill. Let me go and call your maid to you."

"No, no," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She sat down again in a purposeless sort of way. Her hands lay idly in her lap, and she gazed out at nothing, with dry, tired eyes. All her strength and courage had left her. She sat there in utter shame and weariness, while the sunshine slanted into the gay painted room, and the fountains splashed in the garden outside, and the palm leaves rattled together in the breeze, and the ring of voices and whir of the passing traffic sounded in from the narrow dusty street.

Galli, with his imperial head and pale, impassive face, came in softly to see if *monsieur* the Colonel had finished his breakfast; but Philip motioned him impatiently away.

"Oh, I have sunk very low!" she almost moaned. "But you are strong and merciful, Colonel Enderby. If you knew what I have suffered, you would not blame me very much."

"Who am I that I should dare blame you at all?" he asked quietly.

"I have borne it all so long; I have eaten my heart out with miserable thoughts," she went on, in the same dull nerveless way. "And I have had nobody to speak to, nobody to help me. Look, Colonel Enderby; I used to fancy myself born to console others, to reconstruct society, to bind up all broken hearts, to set the world straight. I have given up everything by degrees, all my foolish noble schemes, all my splendid dreams, everything. And what for? For a man who does not love me. I have neglected my old friends, forsaken my old pursuits and interests. He has laughed me out of all of them, with his gentle little mocking smile and his sweet voice."

"The scoundrel!" said Philip Enderby, under his breath.

"He has driven me into hardness, unbelief. He has even come between me and my husband's child, till the most terrible temptations have assailed me; till I have been on the edge of mortal sin. And yet I care for him," she added. "Heaven help

me! I care for nothing else. What is this thing love, which men praise and belaud and represent as the glory and blossom of life? It seems to me a very curse and devil's gift. What does it do but wreck us, bewilder us, drive us crazy, poison all that is purest and best in us with one mad overmastering desire?"

Colonel Enderby shuddered. The words were terrible to him coming just at this moment. His own love was deep enough; but it was of a very different complexion. It made his brain giddy to look into the turgid depths of this woman's heart. Her entire disregard of conventionality, the singleness of her purpose, and the fierce sway of her passion, were revolting to him. He had no words to meet her with, no consolation to offer.

"Hadn't Jessie enough," she went on, looking up with a sudden flash of anger—"hadn't she enough, I say, with her radiant health and youth and beauty, with all the admiration society was ready to lavish upon her, but she must have this man's love also? Ah! those bright, innocent young creatures are so cruel, so very cruel. Their hands are never full enough; they clutch at everything in their careless, light-hearted, pitiless way. They leave nothing—nothing for us older women. They won't allow us the veriest pittance; they make us starve, while they have sufficient to fill a multitude. It is the old story of the rich man who, with all his flocks and herds, must still have his poor neighbour's one lamb. Hadn't she enough already? Why couldn't she spare me this man?"

"Does Jessie care for him?" interrupted Philip, hoarsely.

"Pah! like that," Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay answered. "As you care for the flower you buy for fifty *centimes*, and let wither for an hour in your button-hole! But remember," she added, standing up, and speaking very clearly and distinctly—"remember, it is all my fault. I do not blame her, and I have no right to blame him. I thought she would amuse him. At first I encouraged their being together. I only thought of making the time pass pleasantly for him. Then, lastly, in a moment of insanity, I committed the unpardonable error of shutting them up together in the solitude of that hateful little villa. I have been a fool, and one pays pretty heavily for folly in this world.—Oh, take her, Colonel Enderby; for pity's sake, take her!"

She turned to him, laid her hand on his arm, and looked at him with eyes wild with entreaty.

"She likes you, and she is as charming as a summer's day. Take her, before—before——"

Eleanor's voice had risen almost into an inarticulate cry. There was a sound of footsteps on the loose gravel of the garden

path just outside, and the window was suddenly darkened by an ample female figure. The Colonel and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned hastily round, and moved a step or two apart.

"Oh, pardon me!" said Mrs. Murray, looking from one to the other with ill-concealed curiosity. "I am afraid I have interrupted you. I was told you were here, Colonel Enderby. I was afraid of missing you. I thought I would just come, you know, and make sure. I did not know dear Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was here too. This is unexpected pleasure indeed."

Mrs. Murray was not quite a pleasant-looking old lady. Her eyes were small and twinkling; her red-brown hair—still suspiciously unfaded—was waved and puffed out over her ears. There was a disagreeably vivid colour upon her large cheeks and thin lips. She was extremely gracious and forthcoming; but one might detect a certain watchfulness and hardness behind her genial manner. Red Riding Hood's grandmother when she lay snugly in bed, with the white night-cap tied so neatly under the long lower jaw, making caressing speeches to that historic but unfortunate little maiden, must have looked a good deal as Mrs. Murray did at moments, I think.

Eleanor gathered herself together in an instant. She regained her usual fine manner, and looked very handsome, if a trifle fierce, as she bowed and slowly settled her mantle into its place, with sundry dainty pattings and smoothings. She was pale still, and the dark shade round her eyes had grown almost livid. But the elder lady's presence seemed to galvanize her into calm and self-control with remarkable promptitude.

"Now, I see I am in the way," Mrs. Murray continued. "Don't pray let me interrupt you. I should never forgive myself if I interrupted you."

"You don't interrupt us, believe me," responded Eleanor, with dangerous sweetness. "I was just going."

"Ah, now, I am distressed—really distressed!" cried the other lady, looking from one to the other with sharp, comprehensive glances; under which, it must be owned, Philip reddened slightly. "But I just looked in on my way to join Cecilia and our precious boy. I was passing, you see, and I should have so regretted missing Colonel Enderby altogether."

"I must go," said Eleanor. "Please call Parker, Colonel Enderby. You will find her waiting in the hall. I'll go down to the gate and stop the tram."

As she spoke, she swept out of the window, past Mrs. Murray, and into the glare of the hot sunny garden.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," cried Mrs. Murray after

her, "one moment. I have been so wishing to express our sense of your kindness in——"

But the lady addressed walked straight on, her head erect, her arms folded, her full crisp skirts dragging behind her over the path. Mrs. Murray's words died away; the geniality, too, died out of her countenance.

"Does the woman intend to be impertinent, I wonder?" she said, half aloud.

Colonel Enderby, followed by Parker, hurried across from the hotel after Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay to the gate. As he came up, she turned to him with a courageous smile. Philip could not help admiring her. There was something rather splendid about her, after all.

"Ah! there is the tram. How fortunate! Just at the right moment. Go and stop it, Parker."

Then she paused a moment, and looked steadily at the Colonel.

"You will not go to Spezia by the midday train?" she said, as she held out her hand to him.

Something of the honest sorrow and pity he felt for this unhappy woman got into Philip's blue eyes, as he answered—

"No; I remain here. I shall not go to Spezia."

"Thank you. God bless you!" said Eleanor, quickly.

There was a sob in her voice. She put up her hand and drew her veil down over her face, and then made him a charming little gesture of farewell, as she stepped up into the tramcar.

As Philip, revolving many things in his mind, walked slowly back from the gate, Mrs. Murray, stout, high-coloured, sharp-eyed, camp-stool in hand, met him.

"I really am annoyed at having intruded upon you," she said. "Had I known that you were engaged, of course I shouldn't have come. It was stupid of the hotel people not to tell me."

As she spoke, Mrs. Murray subjected Colonel Enderby to a minute and searching scrutiny. "Dear me, how he has improved!" she thought to herself. "And they say he has money. Can he be seriously occupied with that turbulent widow? Now, if Cecilia had only any spirit——" But Cecilia's fond parent was only too well aware that her daughter had the very smallest possible amount of spirit.

The Colonel was not disposed to be gracious.

"Pray don't apologize," he said stiffly. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was just leaving."

He wanted immensely to get away and be alone; but with Mrs. Murray drawn up so squarely in front of him, it was not quite easy to manage.

"She is a remarkable-looking person," observed that lady, tentatively. "Of course, it is rather a delicate matter to touch upon, but it does seem a pity that she encourages my nephew so much, you know. It has alienated him from the rest of his family in a way we all regret, I can't deny that. Dear Bertie was always such a favourite."

Philip did not reply.

"In a large family like ours such things naturally are talked over, you know, Colonel Enderby. His relations see so little of him now. I have spoken my mind about it more than once. I was determined to come here and see for myself. Cecilia was rather unwilling, but I put it before her as a duty."

"Mrs. Farrell's obedience was always notable, I remember," observed Philip.

Mrs. Murray winced.

"Ah! poor dear Cecilia, how much she has gone through!" she exclaimed piously. "We act for the best. Sometimes I have reproached myself on her account."

Mrs. Murray gently shook her head and closed her eyes, as one whose thoughts lie far too deep for words. But the Colonel made no response; so Mrs. Murray re-opened her eyes after a few seconds, and returned from her abysmal depth of thought with a sort of jerk.

"I detain you," she said majestically.

"Well, I'm afraid I must go indoors, if you will excuse me," Philip assented. "I have to countermand some orders I gave last night."

The old lady's face became rapidly gracious again.

"You are not going, after all? Delightful!" she exclaimed, with a sharp little show of enthusiasm.

Colonel Enderby felt compelled to answer, though he did not the least enjoy submitting his actions for Mrs. Murray's approval.

"No, not for a few days yet;" and, lifting his hat, he passed into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COLONEL CLASPS HANDS WITH HIS FATE.

On the eastern side of Genoa, but still within the limits of the city, there is a retired and unfrequented roadway. It offers a soothing contrast alike to the famous streets, with their long *façade* of splendid palaces and their swarming, hurrying, human crowds; and to those tortuous, narrow, melodramatic-looking by-

lanes and passages which, with gloomy doorways opening out into dim dusky pavements, and heavily barred windows high up in the melancholy house-walls, form the less fashionable quarters of the brilliant city.—Murderous-looking places these last, where warm, robust, and ancient smells stagnate from year's end to year's end, and where you almost break your neck in the effort to catch a glimpse of the ribbon of radiant blue sky that palpitates between the contorted lines of the high, repellant house-roofs far above.

On one side, the roadway in question is bounded by a sea-wall, against which the waters of the Mediterranean gurgle and murmur hoarsely some fifteen feet below. On the other side are earth-works, overgrown with weeds and coarse grasses, in which shine the black burnished sides of cannon, their gloomy mouths pointing seaward. Beyond, the ground rises steeply in the picturesque garden of a charming villa, enclosed on the right by a high wall, masked with flowering creepers, and overtopped by the sombre spires of a row of cypresses. Looking westward, you command the vast semicircle of the Port, with its mass of shipping and glittering blue waters, framed in a broad crescent of stately painted houses, that rise up the sloping hillsides towards lustrous gardens and shimmering olive grounds,—guarded above by the purple steeps of the Apennines and by a ring of pale ghostly fortifications, outlined keen and clear against the sky.

About four o'clock in the afternoon following his critical conversation with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, Philip Enderby sauntered slowly up the roadway, absorbed by a multitude of pressing thoughts. He had come into Genoa on business. He had wandered rather aimlessly through the city, till he found himself landed in this comparatively retired spot.—It seemed a good place to rest in for a while, and try to arrive at conclusions.

Close by, on the left, where the earth-works ended, a quantity of shot was piled, each dark ball of metal giving off an iridescent dazzle of light as the sunshine touched it. A sentry, with his carbine on his shoulder, paced backwards and forwards, in front of the long, grey, windowless building of a powder-magazine. The man was a fine-looking fellow. His handsome southern face showed dark and ruddy above his blue-grey uniform and under his white linen-covered *képi*; and his white gaiters twinkled in the glaring sunlight as he moved.

The regular tramp of the sentry's feet and his tall, straight figure were very pleasant, somehow, to Colonel Enderby. He leaned back against the broad sea-wall, and proceeded to light a cigar in a leisurely and abstracted manner.

He wanted to be quite calm and judicial-minded, to go through

the whole matter from beginning to end.—First, there was his love for Jessie. Philip did not waste much time on that point. In the last twenty-four hours it had become far too vital a part of him to need any questioning or careful scrutiny. Next, there was the question whether, under the circumstances, he was justified in declaring his love to her, in doing his utmost to win the young girl. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's wild words—some of them Philip tried to forget and put away from him; "The poor thing was half mad," he thought—had revealed to him a horrible and perilous condition of things at the Villa Mortelli. The pity and misery of the situation touched some of the deepest and finest chords in his nature. It was frightful to think of that fair, innocent child and the bitter war of conflicting feeling that was being waged round her all day long; frightful to think of her habitually breathing an atmosphere poisoned with the fumes of fruitless passion.

Philip thought and thought, weighed his own disabilities against the girl's danger; tried to look on into the future, and seize, by prophetic insight, an idea of how things would go—of married life for himself, and for Jessie; of the temptations, difficulties, that might arise and must be guarded against;—tried to get some notion of the whole new untried world of emotion and experience that lay before him;—counted, too, the risk of refusal. The disappointment would be terrible. Last night it seemed painful enough. What would it be if it came some weeks hence, when the sight of the girl's beauty and charm had become a habit and daily necessity?

The sentry paced on in the hot, still sunshine; the beautiful city lay glittering between the purple mountains and purple sea. Philip turned and looked away to the far southern horizon. He felt the critical moment had come—the moment of supreme decision, which would colour, for joy or sorrow, his whole future existence.

There were voices in the garden above; a sound of music from the open windows of the villa; a train of mules clattered by, with a jingling of bells about their fantastic harness; the sea swirled up over the points of rock, and splashed gently against the rough bases of the masonry; and the even tread of the soldier beat out through all the rest with an almost fateful ceaselessness and regularity.

Philip Enderby's whole spirit was shaken with unspoken prayer and strong immutable resolve. He was ready to take all risks. If God would give him the exquisite gift of this girl's love, he would dedicate himself henceforth to her service; he would keep himself pure and spotless for her sake; he would say no word,

harbour no thought, that he need fear to tell her of. By tenderness, by constant care, by absolute devotion, he would make her happy. He would live for her, and her only.—"Ay, and die for her too, if that should seem best," he added suddenly, half aloud.

Then for a brief interval a great wave of sadness rushed over him, a swift dread of coming pain and disaster; but it passed as suddenly as it had come. And hope—hope of good things, of gracious, tender, and lovely things, ahead there in the coming days—was dominant in Colonel Enderby, as he made his way back through the Genoese streets that evening.

So, contrary perhaps to his better judgment, the Colonel gave way. Cynical persons will smile, and remind us that instances are but rare of successful resistance to a certain class of emotions. Worldly minded persons will complain that there is a savour of crudity and contemptible easiness in our hero's readiness to take a young lady so very obviously thrown at his head. For myself, I venture to hold my own opinions concerning my friend's conduct at this juncture, and to cry after him, as he goes away, filled with the joy of hope and promise,—Good luck to you, true heart! Heaven send you pleasant dreams and no rude awakening.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELEANOR TRIES TO BREAK HER CHAIN.

MEANWHILE, poor Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had passed a sufficiently wretched day after her excited expedition of the morning. She had lain on her bed, half blinded with nervous headache, tired out, past caring whether her *démarche* had been a wise or a foolish one; only aware of active physical misery, as one long hour dragged by after another through the burning afternoon.

That worthy person, Parker, within whose flat, ungenerous-looking bosom beat a warm and faithful heart, shifted the pillows for her over and over again, and bathed the racked and throbbing head. Parker did not ask to have things explained to her. She entertained an unalterable conviction that the action of some man was at the bottom of every woman's troubles, and, on that basis, was invariably ready to build up a superstructure of practical help and tenderness. This stern hard-featured woman, notwithstanding her unresponsive face and didactic manner, was full of maternal instincts, which were wont to find their outward expres-

sion, silently but very soothingly, in the tending of her handsome, over-excitable mistress.

"You are the most solid comfort I have in life," the latter often said to her. "You are always there to fall back upon, and I cannot get along without some one to fall back upon."

Parker would reply with a sardonic smile. She did not always think her mistress very wise; but, possibly, she cared for her none the less on that account. Even the most devoted of lovers is sensible of a stirring of self-complacency in observing the aberrations of the beloved one's judgment. We must value ourselves above others for something, at times, or our own society would become intolerably tedious even to the most humble-minded of us, I fancy.

Nor had Jessie passed a day very much to her taste either. She had been alone; and to be alone was one of this young lady's severest trials. Mr. Ames had gone out, for him, quite early. She had only seen him at breakfast, when he had said very little, and stared at her once or twice with eyes as objectionably mournful as Malvolio's. Her step-mother had been invisible, and Parker had been invisible too—a fact which Jessie the less regretted, as she seldom found that good woman's society very enlivening. Little Miss Keat was in England. Colonel Enderby was gone.

Jessie wandered about disconsolately. Her trouble was, doubtless, of much the same order as that of a lively kitten, which can find nothing and nobody to play with, and which mews plaintively over the waste of its unemployed energies. Still, though the kitten's sense of discomfort may appear as a very trivial matter to some earnest soul toiling strenuously after a great and universal good, it is sufficiently trying and absorbing to the kitten itself, I imagine; the very limitations of its nature, which cause its discomforts to appear of so slight moment to the afore-mentioned earnest soul, necessarily making its small griefs the more urgent and the harder for the little creature to bear. We are too apt to forget that, though the troubles of deep and of shallow natures differ widely in kind, they do not differ, after all, very sensibly in degree. A tiny brook may be full to overflowing, as well as the mighty river that submerges a quarter of a continent.

Quite late that evening Eleanor came slowly downstairs. Her room had become unbearable. She threw a thin white woollen shawl about her head and shoulders, and, going out on to the terrace, sat down on the seat against the trellised arbour. The semi-darkness and cool, fragrant air of the night were grateful to her after those weary hours of feverish pain. She sat still, in a

condition of mental vacuity, sensible only that she was physically less wretched than she had been, and that that in itself was an immeasurable boon.

At last the stillness was broken by the sound of a man's footsteps coming up the carriage drive. There was something light and yet leisurely in the tread which Eleanor immediately recognized. She remained perfectly quiet, hoping that Mr. Ames might go into the house without perceiving her presence. She dreaded meeting him after her late confession to Philip Enderby. She almost held her breath, and pressed herself back among the overhanging foliage of the arbour. She felt very weak and languid, wholly unfit for sustaining a part in a dialogue of an intimate and possibly painful character.

Bertie Ames paused for a moment. His eye had been caught by the faint, luminous glimmer of his cousin's white shawl. He came straight along the terrace, and stood a few paces from her.

"Is that you, Eleanor?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered reluctantly.

It was too dark for either to see the other. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay shifted her position slightly and sighed. She was frightened somehow. Presently Bertie spoke again.

"Colonel Enderby has not gone yet, I find. I had the privilege of seeing him for a few minutes this evening. I am not conceited enough to suppose that he wishes to pick a quarrel with me—I am not sufficiently important for that; but I must say his manner was hardly what I should define as conciliatory."

The young man waited after he had spoken. His silence seemed to compel an answer.

"I knew already that Colonel Enderby had decided to stay on a little longer," said Eleanor.

"So I supposed," observed Mr. Ames.

There was another silence.

"Bertie," Eleanor said at last, with a certain tremor in her voice, "would you mind very much going away for a week or so?"

"Thanks, cousin Nell," he replied. "I quite appreciate the excellence of your intentions in making that proposal. But I don't think I quite see my way to leaving Terzia just now. There is my dear aunt, Mrs. Murray, for one thing, who has come here fired with all manner of philanthropic zeal to save me from dire dangers—so she intimates, at least. Then, you know, I don't much care about travelling without Antonio. I am horribly lazy about packing and so on, and I can't very well deprive you of your cook at a few hours' notice."

"I thought it would perhaps be better for every one," she said humbly. "I thought it might spare some pain."

Bertie laughed a little.

"Oh," he returned, with all possible sweetness, "as to that, we decided on the victim last night, Eleanor. Pray don't vex yourself about me. I assure you, I shall be quite interested in testing my powers of endurance. I have an enthusiasm for self-torture worthy of an Indian fakir just at the present moment."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had risen hastily while he was speaking, and walked towards the house. In the doorway she turned round. The light from within fell on the young man's slim figure. She surveyed him critically from top to toe; there was a spice of contempt in the expression of her fine eyes.

"Yes, you are strikingly like an Indian fakir," she said. "You dress admirably for the part. There is a touch of exquisite realism, for instance, in that tuberose. You are like the fakir in this too—that you appear supremely indifferent to the fact that your experiments in self-torture may present an intensely disagreeable spectacle to other people."

Bertie Ames raised his eyebrows.

"Really," he said, "this demonstration appears to me a little uncalled for. You have got your own way in all essentials—as I predicted—won't that suffice?"

Then he took off his hat and gloves with much serenity and composure, and followed his cousin in a leisurely manner across the large flagged hall.

He found her with her head thrown back, leaning against the wall just at the foot of the staircase.

"Good heavens! Nell, what is the matter? You look as white as a sheet!" he cried.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's lips were tremulous; she had a difficulty in speaking.

"It is very absurd, but I feel as if I couldn't get upstairs alone. I'm very sorry to trouble you, Bertie, but I am afraid I must ask you to go and call Parker for me."

Really it seemed a great pity that Mr. Ames had muddled his matrimonial prospects so hopelessly, for in many ways he would have made an admirable husband. He had all the instincts of a first-rate nurse; he was observant, endlessly patient, delightfully handy, and as quickly affected by the sight of physical suffering as the most soft-hearted of women.

"I can help you ten times better than Parker," he answered. "Here, let me come this side of you. Now take hold of the banisters with your other hand. Don't tumble over your gown. There!"

As he spoke he put his left arm firmly round Eleanor's waist, and carried rather than led her upstairs.

Half-way she paused to rest for a minute; she was faint and dizzy, and miserably weak. Whether she would or no, she leaned nearly her whole weight on the young man's encircling arm.

"Don't let us quarrel, Nell," he said, in a low voice. "We have never done that yet, you know. It would not be quite like us; it would give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Several people would look wise and say they had always foretold it, and rejoice with evil rejoicing if you and I were known to have fallen out. I am afraid I said some detestable things last night, but I believe I was in a condition of temporary insanity. A quarrel with you would be quite the most distressing thing that could befall me—now."

He emphasized the last word gently.

Eleanor fully realized the significance of that gentle emphasis. Still, his words had comfort in them of a kind; and she was in almost abject need of comfort at the moment.

"I am ready to go on, Bertie," she answered, very simply; "but I am so knocked up that if I talk I'm afraid I shall begin to cry."

At the stair-head Parker met them.

"I told you you weren't fit to go out, ma'am," she remarked, with some severity.

Even the kindest persons derive a certain pleasure from the fulfilment of their own dismal prophecies. It may be questioned whether Jeremiah would not have presented a much more lamentable figure to his contemporaries even than he did, if all his heart-breaking prognostications regarding coming captivity had proved, in the end, illusory.

Parker glanced at Mr. Ames with considerable dislike and suspicion.

"Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is not going to sit up and talk to-night, sir," she said, with a sort of snap.

"Certainly not, my dear Mrs. Parker," replied that gentleman, with his most assuaging smile. "My cousin seems really ill. I have been out all day, you know, and I can't conceive what you have been doing to her meanwhile."

Parker sniffed. It was her way of expressing unlimited scorn and withering contempt for the frauds, prevarications, manners, morals, and general intelligence of the male sex.

CHAPTER IX.

"PEU DE GENS SAVENT ÊTRE VIEUX."

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that Philip Enderby found Jessie more captivating than ever on his return to the little red villa. He had acquired, for a time at least, the right to think about her, to look at her, to admire her unrestrainedly. He had the right to let himself go—and, as most of us know, that sort of going is one of the very pleasantest sensations in the world. Then, Jessie was so frankly glad that he had returned, and she manifested the gladness after such a simple, radiant, dainty sort of fashion. She was, indeed, inimitably bright and fresh.

I fear that in speaking of this young lady I reiterate the above adjectives to the point of tediousness, and yet I cannot very well avoid it. Of some people it is enough to cover, or try to cover, the effect they produce on the mind of the spectator once and for all. It is not necessary to insist on the definition because there is a certain stability in the subject of it. But in the case of such persons as Jessie, and they are rare enough, the charm of whose charm consists in the fact that it is always new, always appealing with another touch of delicate originality, always shifting and changing, with a thousand fleeting lights and shadows—because there is an ephemeral quality about it, constant only in bewitching inconstancy—one is driven over and over again to note the sense of novelty, of refined surprise and quickened observation, that it produces upon the onlooker. Jessie, when pleased and desirous of pleasing, was undoubtedly a being created to be fallen in love with. Yes, notwithstanding his momentary misgivings and forecastings of possible tribulation, the Colonel was in an enviable situation at this moment. It would seem ridiculously superfluous to expend any of one's available stock of sympathy on him.

Mrs. Murray, though not exhibiting all the virtues supposed to be appropriate to the period of old age in their most patent and engaging form, is really a far more pathetic figure, to my thinking, than Philip Enderby, with his fine dash of heroism and poetic instinct.

She was not a nice old woman; and that in itself, rightly considered, is a terribly distressing thing. High-minded, pure-hearted persons need not be so very much commiserated after all, even if hard times do come to them now and again. They are secure

of their reward somewhere—though not possibly in this present state of being—and that it will be a full and sufficient one we need not doubt. But as for narrow, shrewd, worldly souls, who have applied themselves diligently to scraping up all possible satisfactions off the surface of life, who are hopelessly rooted in the material order of things, whose hands are soiled with continual and eager grasping at vulgar transitory advantages,—these souls will doubtless have their reward too. But, good heavens! what a windy, stomach-achy sort of reward it promises to be! We will shed tears, bitter, yet proud, over our heroes, if you will; but, in pity's name, let us keep a few honest drops for the horrible disappointments of these poor, empty, starving wretches.

Mrs. Murray had, for many years, sedulously set herself to make a friend of the Mammon of Unrighteousness. But so far, I suppose, she had not been very successful in conciliating that popular deity, since she was still knocking about the world on a limited income, with no visible prospect of a speedy reception into everlasting or well-appointed habitations. She put an inordinate value on wealth, on social position, on the printing of names even in the second part of Dod's ten-and-sixpenny peerage. It seemed to her a very crown of blessing that people should have occasion to say of one: "Ah, dear Mrs. So-and-so, she was one of the Dashes, don't you know, and her mother was an Asterisk." Cecilia's marriage had been a very ripe and full-bodied glorification to her, because it introduced a sprig of nobility into the family. But now that poor Eugene had been gathered to his fathers, leaving his widow little enough beyond his debts, and that precious prefix to her name, Mrs. Murray began to think it was about time to look out for something solid in the way of yearly income. Cecilia, it was true, was sadly wanting in spirit: yet, as Mrs. Murray closed her thin red lips over her surprisingly white and even teeth, she flattered herself that very possibly she still had spirit enough for two.

From the moment she met Colonel Enderby on that critical Sunday evening she had planned a campaign. The check which she received from the news of his intended departure only served to stimulate her activity: we are all a trifle disposed to overvalue the worth of a vanishing good. Now that she learnt he really proposed to stay on, the dear old lady set herself gallantly in battle array, beat the warlike drum, and played the inspiring fife in poor Cecilia's meek ears. Not loudly and openly, of course; but with innumerable hints, suggestions, touching reminiscences of early loves, and well-marshalled fears for poor darling little Johnnie, left, alas! so early without the healthy moral and social influences of

a father's presence. All is fair, says the proverb, in love and in war; what, then, can possibly be unfair where love and war so obviously go along hand-in-hand?

"Johnnie is a high-spirited child, Cecilia," she said on one occasion, when, the high-spirited child having at last been consigned to his bed, the two ladies were spending the evening together in their little *salon*.

"Yes; I am always very thankful for it," answered Mrs. Farrell. "I think it shows he is healthy."

Mrs. Murray stuck her white bone needle into her strip of crochet, crossed her hands on what had formerly been her waist, and prepared for action. She was taking her ease in her inn, arrayed in a purple-and-black striped dressing-gown, and large, easy, red slippers. She had slumbered, too, a little after dinner—a habit that grows upon even the most vigilant of us with age—and her white lace cap had fetched way during the sweet abandonment of sleep, and inclined to the left in a somewhat lax and ill-regulated manner. But what did that matter? Even in undress uniform, Mrs. Murray felt equal to attacking and successfully routing her daughter.

"Of course, you can look at it in that way, Cecilia, if you like," she said sternly. "But it seems to me a great pity you should be so infatuated about the poor child; it can't be for his good. And it often obliges me to put things before you, and say things which I'd far rather not."

"Is anything the matter? Has Johnnie done wrong?" hastily inquired Mrs. Farrell.

"Ah! that's just like you, Cecilia—flaring up in a moment, before one has time to explain one's self. It is impossible ever to talk over anything quietly with you."

Mrs. Murray picked up her crochet and worked diligently for a minute or two. She knew her daughter as completely as a violinist knows his instrument. She had played on this poor human instrument often enough, and was accurately aware how to produce the effects she required.

Mrs. Farrell moved across and closed the door of communication between the *salon* and her bedroom. As she did so she paused for a few seconds to listen to the even breathing of her child.

"We might wake him," she observed parenthetically.

The elder lady worked on in silence.

"If you have anything to complain of in Johnnie's conduct, I should be so glad if you would tell me," resumed Mrs. Farrell. "I know how interested you are in him; I always value your advice."

"Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one," counted Mrs. Murray. "Yes;

twenty—let me see—twenty—twenty-two. So you say, Cecilia; but, at the same time, I observe you generally resent my advice pretty hotly when I offer it to you. Twenty-three—twenty-four. Pray don't speak loud, my love; remember how wretchedly thin these foreign walls are."

Mrs. Farrell sat down wearily by the table. She was too much accustomed to sweeping accusations to resent them actively; but the anxious, harassed expression developed itself very sensibly in her worn and faded countenance.

"Twenty-eight," murmured Mrs. Murray. "You spoil Johnnie, and it makes me dreadfully nervous at times—nervous for you both. You have no head, you know, Cecilia; you never look forward. You merely think of gratifying the child in the passing moment. Ah! if poor Eugene had only been spared it would have been a great mercy for that boy!"

Cecilia bent down and plucked the little bits of fluff and dust off the table-cloth with trembling fingers.

"You used to say Eugene wouldn't make a good father," she said slowly, in a low voice.

"No, no, Cecilia; there you are entirely wrong," cried Mrs. Murray, with amazing energy. "You really have the most defective memory. I certainly never said that. It would have been the most unwarrantable thing to say; and I hope—I do hope—that I always weigh my words. I, at all events, recognized poor Eugene's good qualities. He was very fond of children—Eugene was very affectionate. A man is, almost invariably, more thoughtful for his child than for himself. I repeat, Eugene would have been the greatest blessing to that unfortunate boy."

Mrs. Murray picked up her crochet again.

"Thirty-one, thirty-two," she murmured, with dignity.

Upon my word, at times one is tempted to think these forbearing, long-suffering, humble-minded individuals will have a great deal to answer for some day. They give so much opportunity for sinning on the part of others. Whether the interests of public morality are, in any degree, served by this turning of the other cheek to the smiter is a question which will present itself to one now and again. It would have been far wholesomer for Mrs. Murray, surely, if her daughter had told her roundly that she was nothing better than an insolent old tyrant, and had then left her to digest in solitude that pungent truth. But Cecilia Farrell did nothing of the kind. She knew more was coming, and, with the patience of a Griselda, she waited for it.

"Johnnie wants a man," said Mrs. Murray, after a while, in an oracular tone. "He needs a stronger hand than yours, Cecilia.

I do my best; but then, who will listen to the advice of a poor, broken-down old woman like me?"

Mrs. Murray sighed and choked a little.

"I am sure, mother, I always try to do what you wish," murmured Cecilia, humbly.

"The Farrells are wild, all very wild," continued the old lady. "Johnnie takes after his father's family. He will give you a lot of trouble yet, my dear, and you're not equal to it. I am resolved to devote myself to you as long as I live. Whatever it costs me, I will never leave you. But who can tell? I am an old woman; I may be called away at a moment's notice, and then——"

Mrs. Farrell was quite moved. She got up, went to her mother's side, and bent down over her.

"You don't feel ill?" she said.

"Bless me! no, not in the least. Why do you ask, Cecilia, in that sudden sort of way? I'm not a bad colour, am I? You don't see anything odd about my eyes?"

Being ill was the thing of all others she dreaded. Sudden death is useful to hoist up as a bogey for dramatic purposes: but at the slightest signs of approaching indisposition, the lady would have sent off post-haste for the nearest doctor. She recovered her composure, however, pretty promptly.

"I'm not ill now, but I may be any day. I lie awake at night, thinking of you and poor Johnnie. Ah! well——"

"Dear mother," said Mrs. Farrell, softly.

"Eugene was not a good husband to you, Cecilia." She glanced up at her daughter quickly. "Perhaps I once did you an injury; I have tried to repair it. I say to everybody, 'Cecilia and I are one; I will never leave her.' But seeing Colonel Enderby again has reminded me of many things."

Mrs. Farrell coloured. She stood awkwardly, in an uncertain lopsided way, by her mother's chair. "Cecilia's carriage always was wretchedly poor," thought Mrs. Murray.

"We won't talk of that, please"—Mrs. Farrell spoke with a trace of hesitation—"it was all over long ago."

"I am not so sure of that. You know I never push myself, Cecilia. I never ask for your confidence unless you offer it to me. I am very tenacious of appearing at all officious. I hope I am always delicate in these intimate matters. But I am not blind, you know; and I'm not at all so very sure that it was all over long ago."

Mrs. Murray closed her eyes and nodded her head emphatically, thereby causing her cap to lurch over a little further in the direction of her left ear.

"It seems to me that our meeting with Colonel Enderby was absolutely providential."

Then she applied herself diligently to counting her crochet again.

"I don't think I quite understand you, mother," remarked Cecilia, mildly, after a few moments' pause.

Mrs. Murray cleared her throat with a rasping noise. With all her devotion to her daughter's welfare, she was sorely tempted to box her ears soundly at times. However, she managed to dominate the liveliness of her irritation.

"You are too modest, Cecilia; you always undervalue yourself. Colonel Enderby was going. He met you in the garden next morning, and immediately decided to stay."

"Oh, it had nothing to do with me. He told me that he was going. It was after Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's visit he changed his mind."

Mrs. Murray looked up sharply.

"Ah!" she said. She had received a check. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is a bold, scheming woman," she broke out. "I haven't any too great opinion of her character. Colonel Enderby ought to be warned."

"Mother, do you think you had better interfere?" asked Mrs. Farrell, in a frightened voice.

"Four, five, six—slip one. How you do catch one up, Cecilia! Did I ever say I should interfere? But if a person of my age, and with my experience, may not sometimes try to keep a fellow-creature from making mistakes, it is hard. Poor Philip Enderby! Men never see through this sort of woman.—Ah, what a husband and father he would be! If I could see you married to Philip Enderby, I should, yes, I should—and poor little Johnnie too—I should die happy."

The excellent lady had become almost inarticulate. Her voice was broken; and two small tears essayed to make their downward way over the powdered surface of her cheeks. But they possessed no very large share of vitality, those two tears. They became confused amid an intricate system of but ill-concealed wrinkles, and, in fine, they never fell.

Cecilia was quite overcome by this exhibition of feeling. Still, her natural rectitude made her reply in a manner hardly calculated to soothe or satisfy her companion.

"Please don't be distressed, mother," she said; "but all that is quite out of the question."

She turned away. She was humble-minded enough, and to spare; yet there are certain admissions which no woman can make without a stab of pain, amounting to absolute anguish.

"You are too kind to see it; but I am old and plain now. No man will ever think of me in that way again."

Mrs. Murray rose.

"You are talking like a silly, sentimental schoolgirl of seventeen, instead of like a reasonable being of over forty. You know just as well as I do that a woman must meet a man half-way. Of course, if she stands up against the wall, and waits till he comes all of his own accord to ask her, she may stand up against the wall for ever. Love at first sight may be taught in boarding-schools, to keep little girls out of mischief; but it isn't taught anywhere else in the world as far as I know. Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Mrs. Murray, snapping her fingers fiercely; "do try to exercise a little common sense, instead of maundering about your age and your looks. You must make the best of yourself; you must be pleasant and seem anxious to please; you must flatter—delicately, of course; but still do it. They're all open to that. At bottom every man's as vain as a peacock. There are a hundred little things a woman can do. Well, then, do them. We must help ourselves, I tell you. You must come forward. A man at Colonel Enderby's age likes a woman who isn't too young. She is less flighty, she gives less trouble. Then, he has never married, so, of course, he has gone on caring for you. You have only got to play your cards well.—Yes, it is really providential," she added devoutly. "You must take more care of your dress—it's slovenly; and buy some prettier boots in Genoa, with heels to them. And think of poor little Johnnie's future!"

Ah! what an inspiring and consolatory doctrine is that of the survival of the fittest. How agreeably it strengthens the hands of the capable, merciless strong, and causes the gentle and timid weak to duck under. How beautifully it is calculated to increase the exercise of the more robust virtues—pride, arrogance, cruelty, and such like. And what a very triumph of paradox, that eighteen centuries of Christianity should have evolved this gospel for us! However, fortunately or unfortunately, as you please, there lingers a leaven in human nature which prevents, as yet, its receiving this gospel in all its fulness. And those foolish persons—I count myself gladly among them—who have but a limited admiration for proud looks and high stomachs, will still cherish a hope of the survival of an unfit minority, among whom it may remain possible to cultivate gentleness, modesty, and a quiet love of personal liberty, without being immediately trampled underfoot.

But this is a digression: and a digression—in the estimation of persons living under the present system of express trains and postal telegrams, persons who have also, in the matter of amuse-

ment, a comprehensive habit of getting through as much in a week as would have lasted their forefathers a good twelvemonth—has a perilous affinity to the unpardonable sin. One trusts that here and there, in remote country districts, there may still be left a few kindly unenergetic folk, who cut out their lives by an older, more leisurely and stately pattern; and who, instead of for ever calling out impatiently to a writer to stick to his text, are willing enough to wander down byways of thought, in comfortable, meditative fashion.

For myself, being naturally of an indolent and vagrant habit, I find it extremely difficult always to sit bolt upright on the coach-box and send my team at a spanking pace along the dusty high-road of my history, with an accurate remembrance of the stage just ahead, where I have to change horses, and set down or pick up another passenger. I have a weak, unworthy craving after rickety donkey-carts, and deep, high-banked country lanes, full of brambles and campion and calamint, that lead nowhere in particular: of old rut-tracks, across waste heaths and broad furze-dotted commons—dear, unfruitful places, with wide, still views of a monotonous and unhistoric description. And so, I pray kind heaven, that here and there I may have the good luck to meet with a reader of the old school, who will be ready enough to get down off the box-seat too, and, bestowing himself graciously in some humbler vehicle, dawdle with me a little by the way.

If a book tells a true story it can hardly fail to end but drearily. Why, then, should we hurry on so feverishly towards a foregone conclusion? Colonel Enderby is happy enough making love, after his quiet, reverent manner, at this moment; and bright-eyed, smiling Jessie is happy enough in receiving his homage. And if the other members of the company are rather on tenter-hooks meanwhile, I protest I don't care a rap. They were all pretty much the authors of their own discomforts, as far as I can see; and may, therefore, very justly suffer a little longer, while I take a stroll for a while and rest my wrists, which get tired and stiff enough with such long handling of the whip and the ribbons.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. MURRAY DECIDES TO PUT DOWN HER FOOT.

MRS. MURRAY, as the pleasant spring days slipped by, became increasingly convinced that it was her bounden duty to open Philip Enderby's eyes to what she was pleased to denote as—Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's true character.

Like many persons whom it would be harsh to designate by the ill-sounding name of liar, Mrs. Murray had a very much more vivid sense of the importance of her own ends, than of the importance of strict veracity. The truth is big enough, after all, to take care of itself. What we poor mortals have to do is to take care of ourselves. The fittest survive, no doubt—in the end the battle is to the strong; but even they have a pretty hard fight of it at times, and must struggle with a certain violence of determination for existence.

Perhaps Mrs. Murray underrated the strength of the enemy. That was excusable enough; many renowned commanders, both in ancient and modern history, have done the same. She had regarded Philip with a species of contempt, when, as a somewhat raw and inexperienced youth, he had first wooed Cecilia. Mrs. Murray was shrewd up to a certain point; beyond that point her cunning failed her; she was liable to fall into errors of judgment, and overreach herself. It has been said that Satan himself is short-sighted. Not for an instant is it desired to imply a resemblance between a respectable old English lady of very fair social standing and the Prince of Darkness. Still, one may venture to admit the probability of a limitation in the acuteness of the supreme power of evil, since one recognizes such distinct limits in the case of those human beings who may be described as—not quite nice. Mrs. Murray could not shake off the impression that the Colonel was more or less of a silly fish. He was in these days, no doubt, a fish extremely well worth angling for; but she fancied he would rise to an artificial fly of very common make. So the lady did not worry herself about refined arts and ingenious concealments of purpose. She waylaid Colonel Enderby at all available corners in the hotel; she planted her camp-stool solidly in front of him at all chance meetings out of doors. She praised her daughter; she mourned over her grandson; she bewailed that congenital tendency towards wildness on the part of the Farrells; she alluded touchingly to the past; she even went so far as to hint at a burdened conscience, and at a laudable desire for reparation.

"The man must be a fool or a flint if he doesn't give way," Mrs. Murray said to herself more than once; and the man, being neither fool nor flint, did give way in a degree. He was filled with a sincere commiseration for Mrs. Farrell, founded on an immense disgust for her mother.

The Colonel rarely permitted himself to say hard things, especially of a woman; but when, one morning, in the privacy of his own room, he found himself referring to Mrs. Murray as "an abominable, painted old harridan," his conscience did not accuse

him of having committed a grave impropriety. In point of fact, he repeated the opprobrious epithet more than once, and found himself sensibly the better for so doing.

Still, Mrs. Murray could not flatter herself that her success was in proportion either to her wishes or her efforts. She saw so little of Colonel Enderby, after all. He was always up at the Villa Mortelli. One day she reached the point of exasperation: she decided to follow him up to the red villa, and fairly carry the war into the enemy's country.

The day in question was hot to the point of breathlessness. In the vain hope of getting a little air from the sea, the whole party sat out on the *loggia*, under a great red-and-drab striped awning, stretched from the house-wall above the window of the drawing-room; and forming a pretty effective shelter from the rays of the afternoon sun. The land and sea reeled and danced in the palpitating heat mist.

Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps there was an intuitive sense of crossing intentions and desires among the little group of people assembled on the *loggia;* certainly the conversation had an inclination to run on dangerous topics. Eleanor was a trifle too vivid; Bertie a trifle too cynical; Cecilia Farrell even abnormally limp and harassed; Mrs. Murray distinctly acid under a fine assumption of geniality; the Colonel somewhat over-stiff and dignified.

Jessie, who at times appeared to possess a keenness of perception, hardly human, of coming storms, whether spiritual or physical, moved about restlessly. She had been arranging several great jars of flowers standing on a table within the open window of the drawing-room. Her charming figure had shown to great advantage as she stretched up to set the graceful flowering boughs in their place, and moved back a step or two to judge the general effect of her handiwork. Philip Enderby had sat and watched her. He found it a remarkably interesting occupation. Now she rested, just opposite to him, on the arm of one of the chairs on the *loggia*, idly twisting the sprigs of leaf and blossom that remained over into a dainty little wreath. Philip still watched her. Her small white hands, with their rounded, rosy finger-tips, were wonderfully pretty as she sorted and arranged the flowers.

"My dear Bertie," Mrs. Murray was saying, with an air which strove to be absolutely disengaged, "you are an authority upon hotels and everything domestic. I want you to give darling Cecilia and me the benefit of your experience."

"I have never looked on hotels as exactly domestic institutions," returned Mr. Ames, in his soft rich voice. "But my experience is at everybody's service. It is briefly comprehended in

one phrase—all hotels are more or less beastly, and all hotel-keepers are more or less swindlers. Does that help you much, dear aunt?"

Mrs. Murray indulged in a sharp-edged smile.

"You advise an apartment, then?" she said.

Colonel Enderby leant a little forward towards the girl.

"Who are you making that for?" he asked her.

She raised her eyes to his face with her usual bright, unshrinking gaze.

"Who? Oh, nobody, anybody—Bertie, Malvolio, you, if you like. I was really making it to please myself. I like to touch fresh leaves and flowers; they feel so nice. There, see!" and she laid the half-finished garland in his hand.

"I never advise anything," said Bertie Ames, with rather an unnecessary drawl. He stretched himself out lazily in his long cane chair, and repressed a yawn elaborately. "I always recommend people to do exactly what they want to do. Advice is a superfluity. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred people don't take it. The hundredth they do take it, with a reservation: then, of course, it turns out badly, and they think you an idiot, and never forgive you."

Mr. Ames looked fixedly at Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay as he spoke. She bent over a large piece of canvas, on which she was working a florid pattern in wools. That piece of canvas had become an institution; it had reappeared at intervals for some years, much to Jessie's irritation. Eleanor possessed but a limited capacity for small industries: her stitches had a curious habit of being crossed alternate ways, and at all conceivable angles. To Jessie, whose quick, concrete mind seized immediately on the right way of doing a thing, and whose deft fingers seemed incapable of an awkwardness, this bungling over needlework on the part of her step-mother was an incomprehensible stupidity.

As Mr. Ames spoke, Eleanor glanced up at him. Her forehead was contracted into a frown; but whether from a struggle to fathom the mysteries of cross-stitch or from some deeper anxiety, one could hardly pronounce.

"I don't think you're quite well, Bertie," she said suddenly. "Have you got neuralgia again?"

Mrs. Murray looked sharply from one of the speakers to the other. She had walked up from the tramcar, and it had been exceedingly warm. In proportion as elderly ladies patronize rouge and rice-powder, they should eschew physical exertion. Mrs. Murray's small eyes twinkled unpleasantly above her large, mottled cheeks.

"When I was a girl," she remarked, "young men of your age never complained of neuralgia."

"Probably not," Bertie answered slowly. "But, you see, when the members of the medical profession had stamped out all the fevers and small-pox, and so on, which persons of quality patronized in your youth, dear aunt, they then observed a probability of their speedily running short of patients altogether. So they immediately set to work, and discovered a number of nervous diseases—nice convenient things, which torture the surface of you, so to speak, and don't get near anything so vulgar as killing. Demand creates supply, and the power of faith is unlimited. As soon as we idle people were assured of the existence of nerves, we began to suffer from them. Nature has an endless power of adjusting herself. All things work together for good, as Colonel Enderby would put it.—In this case, it was mainly for the good of the doctors, certainly. Do you follow me, dear aunt?"

Eleanor changed her position impatiently, with a kind of richly annoyed rustle.

"I really believe it would be cooler indoors," she said. "Jessie, will you go and play to us?"

The girl gathered up her flowers reluctantly.

"My neuralgia is of rather a peculiar kind," Bertie Ames went on calmly, turning to Philip Enderby, and addressing him with most disarming suavity. "It has proved baffling to many skilled physicians. I continue to suffer frightfully at times. My cousin really understands the case better than any one else, I believe. She is great on medical matters, you know; she studied them in connection with a scheme for reforming the unsanitary condition of many Turkish houses. She subscribed to an excellent little society—I wonder if you've any of the reports by you, Nell? they were delightful reading—a little society for sending out English ladies of middle age and unimpeachable morals to overhaul the harems. It was an understanding—I may mention, by the way—that the ladies selected should be distinctly plain. Altogether it was a remarkably interesting scheme. But somehow the Moslem husbands and fathers did not quite seem to see it. They——"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got up hastily.

"Bertie, you are absurd; you are intolerable!" she cried.

"Am I?" he inquired blandly. "I am so sorry. I was under the impression that I was agreeable. The conversation seemed to languish. I was merely doing my humble best to entertain your guests."

He rose slowly as he spoke.

"Shall I bring the sacred carpet indoors?" he added, pointing to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's somewhat colossal piece of needlework.

"Do as you like," she answered, with a touch of temper.

"I was just going to tell you, Colonel Enderby," Bertie resumed, with much composure, "when my cousin interrupted me, about my neuralgia. My cousin has been good enough to interest herself very much in the subject. We have talked it over a number of times—our quiet life here stimulates egotism, you know; it tempts one to be a little personal. We have arrived at the conclusion that the case is rather serious; that, in short, I suffer from neuralgia of the heart. It is a dangerous affection; it has been known, at times, partially to obscure the reason."

Colonel Enderby was standing up too. He looked full in the young man's handsome, brown eyes, as he answered—

"Upon my word, then, I should do my best to find a cure at once, if I were you. A man's life mayn't be worth very much; but as long as he does live, there can be no question as to the advantage of his keeping his reason."

"True," murmured Mr. Ames, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows. "Quite true, though just a shade brutal, perhaps, in the statement of it.—Yet, in some ways, it is singularly interesting to hear you say that. Now, Jessie, like a delightful little person, leave off weaving memorial garlands for me, or Malvolio, or Colonel Enderby, if he likes them—that was the phrase, I think?—and go and play to us. It appears to me we all require soothing."

Jessie turned from him with a slightly petulant gesture. Then she looked round at the rest of the company.

"You are really coming in?" she asked. "I don't like being alone. I play much better if I know people are listening."

"I am invariably ready to come and listen, Jessie," said Bertie, mildly.

"You are all very well," the girl answered, looking down and fingering her little wreath; "but you are not quite enough, Bertie, to be inspiring by yourself, you know."

"Oh, we'll all come!" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay hastily. She moved a step or two aside with a sweep of full crisp skirts, and, turning to Mrs. Farrell, smiled and motioned her to pass in first at the open window.

Mrs. Murray essayed to rise; but her chair was low, and she was not always very agile in these days.

"Can I help you, mother?" asked Cecilia, coming towards her.

Mrs. Murray paused a moment before replying, then she said—

"No, my dear; I think, on the whole, I'll remain where I am. You will excuse my not coming in with you?"

"Oh, most certainly! Pray don't move," responded Eleanor, with considerable alacrity.

"Colonel Enderby, you'll stay with me now, won't you?" Mrs. Murray went on. "I have not seen you these two days past, for more than a minute at a time. And there is nothing, if I may say so, which I enjoy more than a quiet chat with you. As one grows old, you know, one does so value good conversation. I have said to Cecilia more than once, 'Now, Colonel Enderby talks really well: none of that light, scrappy, senseless talk one hears so much of now; but real good conversation.' It reminds me of the sort of thing I was accustomed to years ago, in poor Mr. Murray's lifetime. We lived very much in political society then, you know. Ah, one so seldom meets a good talker nowadays!"

However admirable his speech might be, Philip could also command a convenient power of silence, when it suited him to do so. He bowed a mute acknowledgment of his companion's polite observations. Her mature, not to say over-ripe, blandishments were eminently distasteful to him—all the more so just now, as he saw Mr. Ames within, in very close proximity to Jessie, opening the piano for her. Yet he could hardly desert Mrs. Murray after her late address. Philip's code of good manners demanded certain sacrifices of him; and he made them, as a rule, without flinching.

"I often think," said Mrs. Murray, in a low, confidential tone, shutting her eyes, raising her right hand, and then dropping it again with a little flop on her lap—"Yes, I often think to myself, Colonel Enderby, Ah! what a difference, when I see my own dear Cecilia and our hostess side by side! I observe people a great deal, you know. At my age what is there left for one to do but to observe, and strive to help a little now and then?"

Philip acquiesced silently again. What on earth could he say? The difference was sufficiently marked, and not the most courteous-minded of men could pretend it was very sensibly in poor Mrs. Farrell's favour.

"I know what every one would say," Mrs. Murray continued, with an air of remarkable candour. "Maternal prejudice, and all that sort of thing, you know, when I talk in this way. But I look below the surface, my dear Colonel; and the difference between those two women in heart, in temper, in feeling, in real devotion, is greater than any merely external differences."

Meanwhile, Jessie had begun playing. The girl usually

selected somewhat dramatic and emotional music. Her taste was not by any means regulated, either in her choice of pieces or manner of rendering them, by the ordinary English-schoolroom standard. There was a dash of something audacious and professional in her style of playing, which had been known, before now, to excite not only surprise but alarm in the breasts of her auditors. Certain worthy ladies, for instance, who consecrated their superfluous energies to the cause of the German Jews, were little short of scandalized by Jessie's musical performances; and had left her step-mother's *appartement* in Florence, on more than one occasion, with their ears tingling, and an uncomfortable feeling that they had been assisting at something little short of an indecent orgy in the way of sound. I am not prepared to maintain that even Philip himself was not startled, at moments, by the unmistakable passion which this slender, dainty, innocent-eyed maiden contrived to throw into her playing. If he had heard any other girl play in that same broad, fearless fashion, he would have been disposed to call it the least bit unfeminine; but the Colonel's critical faculties were obscured where this individual girl was concerned. Jessie stood alone in his mind, and could no longer be subjected to the careful measuring meted out to other mortals. There is a love—a dear, old-fashioned, simple love, rarely enough found now, I fear, which swallowed the beloved object whole, so to speak—which ignored blemishes, overlooked defects, refused to admit the most patent of facts, if they threatened to detract in ever so slight a degree from the absolute perfection of the loved one. Philip's love was of this order—call it foolish, if you will, it is also, perhaps, very sadly beautiful.

Just as Mrs. Murray concluded her speech concerning the desirability of remembering that fair without is sometimes foul within, Jessie stopped playing abruptly. The air still vibrated with the storm of sound that had gone before. She turned and glanced round the room.

"Where is Colonel Enderby?" she asked, in her clear tones. "Didn't he come in?"

"He preferred the *loggia* and my dear aunt's society."

It was Bertie Ames who answered. Jessie opened her blue-grey eyes very wide.

Then, seeing Philip standing outside—"Colonel Enderby, do you really prefer it?" she cried, looking at him and smiling.

The rapidity with which Mrs. Murray heaved herself up out of her low basket-chair, and interposed her voluminous person between Philip and the open window, was positively astounding.

"Go on, go on, dear girl. We hear you charmingly out here.

Delightful music; don't stop, pray," she said, waving her hand in an encouraging, yet imperative manner.

Bertie Ames laughed to himself. He leaned down above the girl's fair head and whispered—"When you are as old as my aunt, Mrs. Murray, will you know how to get your own way as well as she does?"

Jessie dashed her hands fiercely, at random, on the keyboard; her forehead was drawn into quite an angry frown.

"I hate that ill-conditioned old woman," she said, with her little white teeth set hard together. "And you bore me, Bertie, with your odious questions."

Mr. Ames leant his elbow on the top of the piano, and considered the girl thoughtfully for a minute or so. He had never seen her in quite this humour before, and it puzzled him.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I wonder just how much that means."

As soon as Jessie was safely employed again, Mrs. Murray faced round upon Philip. There was a challenge in her bearing. She knew she had ventured pretty far.

"Now, my dear Colonel, we can go on with our talk in peace, I hope," she said.

But the Colonel, by this time, had thoroughly lost his temper. It seemed to him that Mrs. Murray had put herself outside the category of persons to whom one is bound to show respect and consideration. He had no intention of making a scene, but he was prepared to treat her with little mercy.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Murray," he replied, "I am not at all sure that I care to talk."

"No? Ah, well, then I will talk, and you shall listen," she said, still blocking the window with her large person.

Philip laughed. The impudence of this woman was astounding.

"Unfortunately, I am not inclined to listen either," he responded, looking her straight in the face, and slowly pulling the ends of his moustache.

Then that brave old lady, Mrs. Murray, showed the metal she was made of. She put her hand boldly through Philip Enderby's arm, and held him so.

"Oh! but you must listen, Colonel Enderby," she cried. "I have a dozen words I am bound to say to you. Come with me to the other end of the *loggia*."

To resist, to hang back under this employment of physical force, would have been ridiculous, unseemly, clearly undignified, and out of the question;—so he went.

Mrs. Murray took her amiable way to the back of the *loggia*,

from whence a little flying iron staircase leads to the vineyard at the top of the cliff, behind the house. She leant up against the rusty railings of the staircase, which offered but a knife-edge of support to her broad back, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief. Mrs. Murray felt it was a sadly common thing to do; but, poor soul, she was so painfully hot, what with one thing and another.

"My dear Colonel Enderby," she began, in a wheedling tone, "I know you must think my behaviour most extraordinary."

Philip stood stiff, unresponsive, pre-eminently discouraging.

"Yes; most extraordinary. But then, you know, you cannot comprehend the feelings of a mother; no man can do that. We mothers are very lions when the happiness of our children is imperilled. My love for my darling, excellent, faithful Cecilia is my excuse. I cannot," cried Mrs. Murray, with fervour—"no, I cannot, Colonel Enderby, see you neglecting a golden opportunity, and rushing headlong into what I may call the very pit of destruction, knowing what I do know, knowing the contrast between these two women, without opening your eyes, without saying a warning word, without imploring you to——"

At the beginning of this impassioned address, Philip had simply stared; but, as the meaning of Mrs. Murray's words revealed itself, as he began to perceive what she was driving at, he gave a hasty ejaculation of repudiation and anger.

"No, no; I won't be interrupted!" she cried, vehemently. "I can't stand by and see you giving way under the artful fascinations of this heartless woman—using that wretched little girl's prettiness, too, as a stalking-horse to compass her own bad ends—I can't stand by silent, when I know my own dearest child's welfare is at stake. That woman's desire for conquest is insatiable. I know her of old. She can't leave any man alone; she must have every one she meets dangling after her. Look at poor Bertie, estranged from his family, his prospects ruined, spending his money on her, keeping her servants, paying her bills! It makes me blush to see such folly!" she cried, overflowing with virtuous indignation. "And now you are to be ruined too. Why did she leave Florence, do you suppose? Simply, I tell you, because Florence had left her first. She'd filled her house with every sort and kind of riff-raff, socialists, mesmerists—Heaven knows what. Poor Eugene Farrell was there nearly every night, at one time; with Cecilia at home, neglected and miserable, sitting up for him till I don't know what hour. Why did she come here to this dull little hole of a place? Because, I tell you, society would not countenance her goings-on any longer; because——"

Mrs. Murray stopped with a gasp: she was breathless. Nothing, indeed, short of physical incapacity would have stemmed the torrent of her eloquence at that moment.

Philip's righteous soul was full of wrath.

"Mrs. Murray," he said sternly, "I call it a vile and shameful thing to come to a woman's house, and then speak of her as you have just spoken of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. Fortunately, however, I do not believe what you say."

Mrs. Murray was somewhat cowed.

"Ah! but you are giving in to her," she said vindictively. "You are always here. You can't deny that; so, of course, it doesn't suit you to believe what I tell you about her."

"You are labouring under a complete misconception in this matter," the Colonel answered.

The position was odious to him, but he owed it to his hostess as well as to himself to be explicit.

"I have a great respect for Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, but we are merely friends. She would be the first person to assure you of that fact."

Mrs. Murray looked up sharply. There was something in her companion's expression which left her in no doubt but that he was speaking the truth. The desire to know more was absolutely uncontrollable in her at that moment. Her eyes glistened with hard curiosity. She decided to stake her all.

"I am not so uncivil as to answer you as you answered me just now," she said, "and tell you roundly I don't believe you. I have my daughter's happiness at heart, Colonel Enderby. For her sake, poor dear child! I humble myself. A woman will put her pride in her pocket for love of her child. But just listen here. You were going away next day, when we met you that Sunday. Immediately after our meeting, you changed your mind suddenly. We have met frequently since. A certain construction may have been put upon your conduct, you know. For my daughter's sake, I have a right to ask—what made you stay, then? Who did you stay for?"

Mrs. Murray folded her hands, and closed her thin red lips tightly. It was cleverly done, she felt, as she glanced at Philip. She had shifted the point of her attack in a masterly manner. Come what might, he could hardly refuse to answer her.

And Philip was not apt at evasions and subterfuges. Finding himself in an awkward place, he took the shortest and most direct way of getting out of it.

"I stayed," he replied, with quiet dignity, "because I am in love with Miss Pierce-Dawnay. I am about to ask her to be my wife."

For the life of her Mrs. Murray could not restrain a shrill cry. Then she burst out laughing. It was a very unpleasant, old, joyless sort of laugh.

"That little simpering slip of a school-girl!" she said. "Why, Philip Enderby, you are as great a simpleton as you were when I saw you first, five and twenty years ago!"

In a minute more she was standing before her patient daughter, in the large, faded drawing-room. Her face looked very hard and old.

"Come, Cecilia," she said shortly, "we'll go back to the hotel. There may be letters waiting for us. Tea? No, thank you. I pay for my dinner at six o'clock, and I don't care to spoil it."

Mrs. Murray laughed again. One must allow, poor lady, that just then she appeared supremely unattractive.

BOOK FOURTH.

THE PROMISED LAND.

CHAPTER I.

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

As Philip Enderby stood there on the *loggia*, after Mrs. Murray had left him, he saw there was only one course open to him. She had forced his hand. He could finesse no longer, but must play his highest card at once. And yet he would have been very glad to wait a little, to make more sure, before he "put it to the proof, to win or lose it all." He hardly dared think what it would be to lose Jessie now! Mrs. Murray's parting words rang in his ears—though he hardly took them, perhaps, in the sense in which she had spoken them. The folly of his love lay, to him, not in the loving—that was natural enough—but rather in the hope of being loved in return.

Just then Jessie came to the window. She carried a large white straw hat in one hand, and her red umbrella in the other. The sun was getting low in the west. Its level rays streamed in under the coloured awning, and lighted up the slight form of the girl, as she stood, framed in the open window, with the background of the dim drawing-room behind her. Philip looked at her for a few seconds in silence. She was very young; she was almost startlingly pretty.

"It is impossible," he thought to himself. "She will refuse me, and then—well, men have had as sweet hopes knocked on the head before now, and will again, I suppose. Only I should have liked more time."

Jessie's face was not as placid as usual. Her mouth pouted a little, and there was a delicate line between her brown eyebrows.

"I think perhaps you did just as well to stay out here, Colonel Enderby," she said. "I played very badly."

She came on into the yellow glare of sunshine.

"Those people worry me, and Bertie says inconvenient things. It is so easy to be pleasant and happy. I can't think why people need ever be anything else."

"Suppose," said the Colonel, gently, "we go away for a little while, and forget troublesome people and the inconvenient speeches. Will you come with me up the hill yonder, and see the sunset?"

He felt the words were not without a grain of feebleness; but it was difficult to be original at this juncture.

"Tell me first, before I settle whether I will go and look at the sunset or not, whether you really preferred staying out here with Mrs. Murray, to coming indoors with the rest of us?" the girl asked.

"I disliked immensely staying out here," Philip replied, with some warmth of feeling. "I stayed simply because I couldn't help myself."

Jessie's face brightened.

"Now we will go for our walk," she said. "I want to get out. I feel strange and restless; perhaps it will be nicer up there."

The little wood crowning the hill behind the Villa Mortelli, is a delectable place. It is thick with scrub-oak, ilex, and pine trees, rising among a tangled undergrowth of white heath and myrtle;—a quaint, suggestive little wood, fringed along the edge of it with grass and wild flowers, and possessing a number of narrow paths —crossed here and there with knotted roots, or soft with a brown layer of fir needles—which turn and twist, and wind in and out, till they make the small space seem quite vast and imposing.

The effective way of approaching this pleasant wilderness, is to pass along the level strip of vineyard above the house, to the left, —turn at right angles, under some old olive trees, up a narrow gully, where tall canes grow, and clatter their hard stems and long leaves together with a sharp, dry sound in the mountain breeze; pass the old reservoir, where the frogs keep up their discordant chatter; and then—crossing a space of coarse grass, dotted with clumps of heath, through which grey stone crops out here and there, to enter the wood from the rear.

A path leads on, right through it, to the highest point of the hill, where stands a half-circle of white marble benches—dilapidated things, upon which mosses have crept, and on which lichens have gathered, patched together with slabs and scraps of ancient carving, remnants probably of a Roman sarcophagus. This open space is shaded by some pines and a couple of oak trees, their trunks bent, and their branches cut over by the rush of the sea

wind. It commands the same view as the villa below; but the expanse is wider, the horizon higher, the sense of freedom and solitude more complete.

As presiding genius of this sylvan retreat, some long-ago owner of the Villa Mortelli has been pleased to set up, on a tall carved pedestal, a marble image of Pan, with his broad chest, shaggy goat's legs, horns, and prick ears. But Pan, alas! has changed sadly since those far-off early days, when as a strange and awful presence—the godhead mysteriously joined to the brute beast—in the solemn twilight of summer mornings, he crossed the dewy Arcadian uplands, among the sleeping sheepfolds; or wandered from the mountain caverns and fragrant mountain marshes to the reed-beds, by the watercourses, in the fertile plain below; and brought good luck to the wild Arcadian hunters, and ravished the heart of Arcadian youth and maiden with the piercing sweetness of his oaten pipe. Yes; Pan has changed: and for the worse. Under the hand of the Italian artist, too often materializing what it touches, Pan has lost his godhead. Pan is chiefly beast now, or, at best, beast bound to a degraded manhood. He has looked on the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life—on the gorgeous corruption of Imperial and Papal Rome. He knows he is a creature of a monstrous birth, and the knowledge has made him foul.

While the sharp blue shadows of the oak leaves and fir needles played over his marble limbs, in the evening sunshine, there was something almost devilish about the image of Pan, keeping watch on the hilltop, above the little red villa. His wide, full lips parted in a wicked smile. There was an evil droop in his heavy eyelids, and a leer in the sightless eyes. The beating winter rains had left ugly stains and smirches upon him; and his pipes, and the hands which held them, were broken and defaced.

Philip Enderby and Jessie came up silently through the wood. The girl was still under the dominion of some unusual influence: she had not regained her ordinary gay, light-hearted bearing. And Philip was too fully possessed by the thought of the thing he must say to her, to have any small talk at command.

Jessie flung herself down on one of the moss-grown benches, and pulled off her hat. She was strangely moved and excited.

"Oh, I am so tired of this place," she cried, looking away over the broad landscape. "It is always the same—except that sometimes it rains. Nothing ever happens; one day is just like another. And then I think of all the different countries I have never been to and the great cities, and all the beautiful, quick, vivid life that is going on elsewhere, where I cannot reach it, and

I could cry with vexation and longing. Why does Mamma keep me here like a bird in a cage—with that horrible old Mrs. Murray, too, conning and staring at me through the wires!—and give me nothing to do but to hop up and down, and take my grain of seed and drop of water? I want to go away, away, away;—anywhere, everywhere;—see it, and know it all. You have moved about, you have wandered, don't you understand? I feel like the swallows in the spring-time, when they stretch out their long swift wings, and go northward. Oh, I am tired to death of this place! Why can't I leave it for ever?"

Philip straightened himself up. The crisis had come even sooner than he had expected it. This wild mood of Jessie's gave him a higher hope, a better opportunity, than he could have reckoned upon. Yet still it was difficult to speak. The might of his own emotion was almost terrible to him, as he looked at the lovely upturned face of the girl. Pure-lived men, when they give way to love, do it in a somewhat tremendous fashion. All the garnered strength of their manhood, unspent and unwasted, rushes forth in a flood of worship and desire.

"Jessie," he said at last, very gently; "there is one way in which you may leave all this, that you are so tired of, behind you, and begin a new life."

Something in the tone of Colonel Enderby's voice arrested the girl's attention strongly. She rose up, tall and straight, in front of him, while the sunshine rested on her bright curly head; and looked deep into his blue eyes with a wondering, questioning expression.

"What way?" she asked.

"I am almost ashamed to tell you," he answered; "since you have so much to give, and I have so little to offer in return. I am as a very beggar before you. But there is only this one way in which I can help you. I love you, Jessie—love you with my whole soul. I lay my heart at your feet—take or leave it as you will, it must be yours always, just the same. But take it, darling," he said, "take it, and then come away with me as my wife."

The sun was sinking in a blaze of white light behind the far-off purple capes and headlands. The vineyards below lay already in dim shade; only a high-standing painted villa, here and there, among the rich woods and gardens, caught the level rays on its rows of windows, and glared for a moment like a house of flame. The shadows lay long and dark across the turf, and under the trees; and the marble Pan leered from his pedestal, and smiled cruelly as he laid his curved lips to the holes in his broken pipe. Then the sun dropped suddenly; and the west grew pale, and the dim

shade crept up quickly, stealthily, over the hillside and the trees; over the waiting lover and his mistress—while the limbs of the old pagan god seemed to gleam with a weird, unearthly light of their own, in the dusky wood behind them, now the kindly sun was gone.

"Jessie dearest, answer me," cried Philip Enderby, passionately. "Can you care for me? Can you trust me? Will you come?"

The girl turned her head for a moment, as the sunlight died, and the chill shadow came up over her. She gave a little shudder. Then she looked up at the Colonel.

"Yes," she answered softly; "I will come."

Philip took her two hands in his; and then stepped back, holding her at arm's length. He let his eyes rest steadily on her lovely face, on every line and curve of her graceful figure. He looked at his love long and carefully, and behold! she was very fair. His face grew pale. The strong man could have given way utterly at that moment and sobbed aloud. It was too sweet, too wonderful. He felt as though his heart within him must break with love.

"Ah, God help me!" he said.

Yes, it is very awful, this desire of utter self-surrender, this wild worship, this madness of yearning towards the thing we love. It lies deeper than any mere gratification of the senses. Philosophers have called it hard names, and nearly split their brains over it, trying to solve the problem, trying to bridge the chasm, between the me and the not-me, the subject and the object, the noumenon and the phenomenon,—name it by what crack-jawed word you will. The struggle is old as existence. But the lover, of all men, dares attempt a solution most fateful and desperate when he thus casts his life down blindly at his mistress's feet.

For, alas! the chasm can never be bridged. The limits of our nature are set, and we can never cross them. Though lips press lips never so fondly, and hand clasp hand never so closely, and mind meet mind in the fullest illumination of friendship, there is still a measurable distance between us. Contact is not union, though men in all ages have striven to persuade themselves that it is. And hence comes the pain, the anguish, the exquisite bitterness of true love.

It was with some vague knowledge of all this that Philip Enderby looked at the girl before him.

But that long silent scrutiny and swift exclamation affected her painfully. Her charming face grew troubled, and the corners of her pretty mouth began to turn down and become ominously tremulous.

"Oh, what have we done?" she cried, trying to draw away her hands. "I am frightened."

Philip's expression changed. He grew strong again; he was filled with a delicious right of protection.

"My darling," he answered, "there is nothing to be frightened at. You have done the sweetest and most gracious deed a woman can do. Only I love you too well, Jessie, and I don't know how to tell you about it. I would give my right hand to save you five minutes' sorrow or discomfort—and yet I frighten you. We men are awkward, lumbering, tongue-tied brutes at best, dear heart; we cannot express the tithe of what we feel."

Jessie looked hard at him for a minute or so, and then the most delightful smile began to dawn on her face.

"Do you really love me so very much?" she asked. "I believe it will all be very pleasant by-and-by, only I feel a little strange just at first. It seems so dreadfully serious. I do not like things to be too serious, you know."

She paused, and then came a little nearer to him. The colour deepened in her soft, cool cheeks; but she glanced up quite fearlessly into his face.

"Wouldn't you like to kiss me?" she said.

And Pan looked on. In the shadowy dusk a kiss was given and taken, as such kisses have been given and taken since the world began—as they will be given and taken, I suppose, till, innumerable ages hence, the drama of earthly existence is played out at last, and every created thing has passed back again into the impenetrable silence and mystery from out of which, at first, it came. But, for good or evil, two lives had bound themselves with one chain. A change had come over the night and the morning, and life could never be quite the same again.

Half an hour later, Jessie came quickly into the drawing-room of the Villa Mortelli. She walked directly up to her step-mother, and sat down by her. She laid her hand gently on Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's, and nestled up to her side.

"Dear little Mamma," she said, "I am afraid I am very late."

There was something startling to Eleanor, both in the girl's action and in her address. As a rule she avoided all caresses, and made no tender appeals of this kind to her step-mother's sympathy. Eleanor looked at her closely.

"Where have you been, my child?" she asked. "Are you tired?"

Colonel Enderby had followed the girl into the room.

"Jessie and I have been up the hill together, to look at the sunset," he said.

There was a certain resonance in his voice.

Eleanor, as she glanced at him, said to herself, "Why, he has changed; he is quite young. He is certainly a very distinguished-looking man."

Then she had a sudden perception of what had happened.

"Ah!" she cried, clasping her hands together, "you have spoken."

Philip threw back his head and smiled. There was a wonderful light in his eyes.

"I am very happy," he said simply; "Jessie must tell you why."

The Colonel lingered late at the little red villa. The conversation was not very brilliant; and yet, perhaps, he found that evening one of the most delightful of his life. Jessie was quiet and subdued; she kept rather close to her step-mother: but the touch of shyness about her made her more bewitching than ever to her lover. She went down on to the terrace with him when he left at last; and there, in the fragrance and solemn stillness of the spring night, they parted. Philip Enderby had got very near the truth, after all, when he called himself happy.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. PIERCE-DAWNAY GROWS SUSPICIOUS OF HER HANDIWORK.

FOR some reason, Colonel Enderby had developed a strong dislike of Northern Italy, its hot, crowded, modern life, and haunting reminiscences of a not over pure-minded antiquity. A fit of home-sickness came upon him in the midst of his new-found happiness. Like the girl, he wanted to get away. He longed to carry off his charming bride as soon as might be; and her step-mother was not disposed to put any obstacle in the way of the fulfilment of his desires.

There are times when one has a right to be frankly egotistic, to be visibly and unblushingly absorbed in one's own small affairs. Jessie made the most of her privileges in this matter. She was warmly interested in the preparations for her wedding. Her soul was by no means too great to appreciate the fascinations of new dresses and millinery. She did not make any attempt to conceal her pleasure in receiving presents,—not intimating that diamonds are as dross when compared with the words of the lover who offers them. Every healthy-minded girl is a bit of a materialist, and possesses a very hearty respect for those more solid manifestations of affection sanctioned by society. Outward and visible signs are

valuable as symbols of inward and spiritual graces in these as in more sacred matters; and, as a rule, are only despised by somewhat exaggerated and fantastical persons.

But Jessie's materialism—if it must needs be called by so ponderous a name—was far too graceful and delicate an affair in any way to disenchant her lover. It was the prettiest thing in the world to receive her thanks, to watch her sparkling pleasure at some fresh gift. Philip was touched and delighted by her endless power of enjoyment. He grew young in the light of her smiles and in the sound of her laughter. Early and late the thought of her possessed him.

Mr. Ames behaved very well during the time which elapsed between that memorable evening in the little wood behind the red villa and Jessie's wedding. He effaced himself. He paid frequent visits to friends in Genoa, and to Mrs. Murray, who, under the plea that the house Cecilia proposed taking at Tullingworth was not yet ready for her, lingered on still at Terzia. He really manifested most praiseworthy powers of endurance. Indeed, from the moment the engagement was publicly announced, he bore himself so bravely that Eleanor began to fancy she had over-estimated the strength of his feelings towards her step-daughter. And this fancy gave her new hope and courage. She threw herself enthusiastically into the situation; invited friends from Florence to be present at the wedding; lavishly expended both money and energy upon the girl's trousseau; and made arrangements with a somewhat regal munificence with the manager of one of the principal hotels in Genoa. For many reasons it seemed desirable that the wedding should not take place there in the country. The party from the Villa Mortelli would meet their guests in Genoa, the day before the wedding. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay promised herself that it should be quite a brilliant little affair.

Everything, in short, seemed to be going off admirably, when an unexpected stumbling-block and rock of offence turned up in the shape of that devoted waiting-woman, Parker.

"I am sorry, ma'am," she said one evening, as she laid her mistress' dinner dress out on her bed, and pinched the lace ruffles in the sleeves of it into shape, "but I shan't be able to go with you on Tuesday. That new maid of Miss Jessie's can manage very well for you both for one night. I shall stay here till you come back."

Eleanor turned round upon her hastily.

"Really, Parker, at times you are extremely irritating. It isn't at all kind or nice of you to make difficulties just now. Why on earth can't you come?"

Parker stooped down, and arranged some trimming on the front of the dress, which had got a trifle astray, with the utmost composure and precision.

"My feeling is against it, ma'am. There are things you know beforehand you'd better keep clear of, if you want to have your mind easy when you say your prayers of a night."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flashed out angrily.

"Parker, you are simply insufferable! It's all very well to talk about an easy mind and so on; you are dreadfully jealous of Jessie's new maid. You want to make us all thoroughly uncomfortable, just because you fancy you are no longer absolutely indispensable."

"Very likely," replied Parker, grimly. "I suppose nobody cares much to see they can be done without. But I ain't going, all the same, ma'am, jealousy or no jealousy."

She knelt down before her mistress, and carefully put on the latter's neat evening shoes. In doing so she remarked—

"It seems to me a fearful sort of thing, to give a mere child like her over to a man, to do what he likes with. I don't want to see her married, poor thing! no, nor him either. There's no saying where it'll all lead to for either of them. I don't object to a funeral, now. It's comfortable, in a way. You know it's all over and finished, and you can't be held accountable; but I don't care about the other."

Parker rose to her feet.

"You've a hair-pin coming out, ma'am—no, there near the top, to the left.—Not but what I think very well of Colonel Enderby, as men go," she added, rather inconsequently.

Parker, however, followed up her speech with a sniff, which seemed rather to neutralize the worth of this admission, and suggest that, in her opinion, even the best of men could not be expected to go very far.

Mr. Drake, too, sounded a somewhat discordant note more than once, in conversation with his friend. He had travelled back from Venice,—whither, after fruitless waiting for the Colonel at Spezia, he had betaken himself,—to act the part of best man at the coming ceremony. Mr. Drake was naturally gregarious. Under ordinary conditions, the society of some fifteen or twenty agreeable people, with an infinite capacity of talking well about nothing in particular, would have put him into high good-humour. But somehow, the presence of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's guests, gathered together in the large Genoese hotel, did not have a stimulating effect upon him. His native cheerfulness appeared to be in eclipse.

"It all seems so deucedly hurried, you know, Enderby," he

said, when he got Philip alone for five minutes. "Of course, you know your own mind, and all that sort of thing, and I have no earthly business to offer an opinion on the subject. I know that. And, of course, she is tremendously pretty; she'll make an immense success in society at home.—Don't be angry, my dear fellow. If you will marry a young lady of a thousand, you must make up your mind to a little of that sort of thing. But all the same, I wish it hadn't been done like this, in a corner, as you may say. If your people had seen her, and so on, it would be different."

Then, as the Colonel began to manifest signs of impatience, not to say of anger, he cried out:—"There, there! I beg your pardon fifty times over, if I have annoyed you. Of course, it's all perfectly right. Only, upon my word——" Mr. Drake turned away and blew his nose energetically. "Confound it all," he said, "I am so awfully attached to you, Enderby, you know."

Eleanor was not in the habit of seeking private interviews with her step-daughter. She was very well aware that their relations were more satisfactory in public than under the expansive and intimate influences of a *tête-à-tête*. But on this last night, before handing her dead husband's child over into Philip Enderby's keeping, she had a strong necessity upon her to see and talk with the girl once more alone. The gentler instincts in Eleanor's strangely blended nature asserted themselves, and made her feel very tenderly towards Jessie at this particular moment. Then, too, the elder woman was not without a sense of her own shortcomings. Everything was going well, surprisingly well; and yet she knew that she would be more comfortable, and that her conscience would more certainly acquit her of past errors, if cordial and affectionate words passed between her and her step-daughter on the eve of their parting.

She had bidden all her guests good-night, and it was growing late, when Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay walked up the long, bare, glaring passage of the Genoese hotel, and knocked softly at the girl's closed door. There was a pause before any response came from within. Eleanor had a sense of constraint, almost of timidity, as she waited.

The answer came at last, and she went in.

Jessie was standing in the middle of the room. She had taken off her gown; her arms were bare, and her curly hair hung in a luminous cloud about her charming face and shoulders. The room was encumbered with trunks and boxes, and with all that indescribable litter which goes with a great and important packing. Spread out over an armchair, in one corner, lay the rich, soft folds of the girl's white wedding dress, which she had been trying on

earlier in the evening. The night was warm, and one of the tall, muslin-curtained windows stood ajar, behind the wooden lattice of the closed shutters, letting in a thick, continuous hum of voices and patter of footsteps from the great *piazza* below. Genoa was still awake, and moving restlessly about her wide squares and streets of palaces.

Eleanor's dramatic instinct was strong. The sight of this solitary girlish figure, in the high quiet room, with the signs of her marriage and coming departure about her, and the urgent stir and hot full life of the great city surging in through the open window, affected her powerfully. She forgot all the differences which had arisen between them—all those crossings of interest which had put them into an attitude of such disastrous antagonism—and simply yearned, in wholesome womanly love and kindliness, towards this fair young creature, setting forth so gaily on the perilous voyage of matrimony.

"Jessie, dearest child," she said, "I felt I could not go to bed to-night without coming to look at you once more."

She took the girl's hand in both hers and made her turn round, so that the light of the gas-jet, above the marble-topped toilette-table, might fall on her face. Then she drew the girl close to her, and kissed her rounded cheek.

"You look very sweet," she said. "See, dear child," she went on earnestly, "I want you truly and honestly to answer me one question. You are on the eve of a great undertaking,—of, perhaps, the most important event that can happen in a woman's life. Tell me, Jessie, are you quite sure you are happy?"

The girl moved a step away, and looked back at her step-mother unshrinkingly. There was no hint of trouble or misgiving in her pretty eyes.

"Ah, that is so like you, little Mamma," she said, smiling. "You are so fond of assurances. Certainly, I am quite happy. Why should I be anything else? I am immensely interested. I find it all delightful."

The words might have carried conviction, surely, to her listener; but Eleanor wanted more. She felt, as she had often felt before now, that there was something baffling, something curiously difficult to grasp, in this brilliant being's personality. At times, she had asked herself whether her step-daughter was the most absolutely natural, or the most consummately artificial woman she had ever met with.

"But tell me, Jessie," she insisted, "don't mind telling me—remember, I have been a girl too, and can enter into your thoughts and feelings; surely we may speak freely to each other

just now, if we may ever speak freely at all—are you sure you are really in love with Colonel Enderby?"

The girl's face grew graver.

"I never quite understand what people mean when they say all those things about being in love," she answered, "They seem to imply that it is a mysterious and extraordinary condition. I never have understood, and I do not want to do so. It sounds rather uncomfortable and crazy. But I like him very much; I like being with him. He is very pleasant; he is beautifully kind to me."

She smiled, and drew away her hand, which Eleanor was still holding, with an apologetic little shiver.

"Pardon me, but your hands are so very cold, little Mamma," she said; and then added, after a moment's reflection, "I don't quite see why you should ask me these questions to-night. I took for granted you were satisfied, and had meant it all to happen so from the first."

Jessie spoke with perfect openness and good-temper, as though making the most obvious of statements. But to Eleanor the words came as a violent shock. It is not a little disconcerting to hear something which you have known, yet tried not to know,—not acknowledged even in secret to yourself,—proclaimed clearly, concisely, and without the smallest hint of confusion by another person.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay stood for a moment uncertain what to do, how to answer. She had an unreasoning revulsion of sentiment against this marriage of her own making—a revulsion against poor Jessie, too. She was addicted to prompt and daring action; to slightly desperate efforts at making the crooked straight, and rough places plain; but in this case, desire it how she might, prompt and daring action was out of the question. The whole matter had got beyond her control. There lay Jessie's wedding dress; there were her trunks, ready strapped and labelled; there, on the toilette-table, gleamed the string of pearls her lover had given her to wear to-morrow. In the face of these plain, tangible tokens of the position, Eleanor saw she was powerless. Too, her feeling of alarm was, after all, but transitory. She recalled Colonel Enderby's looks when he had bidden her good-night an hour before. They were certainly those of a man who is sufficiently confident of the good promise of his prospects.

"I am attaching an exaggerated importance to Jessie's words," she thought. "Putting a false construction on them, perhaps. I always read between the lines too cleverly, and worry myself when there is no real cause for it."

The girl, meanwhile, had turned back to the looking-glass, and was engaged in coiling up her bright hair.

"I am getting so tired, little Mamma," she said, in a plaintive voice.

The remark brought Eleanor to a quick decision. She determined, in any case, to speak a good word for Philip Enderby before she took leave of her step-daughter.

"I won't keep you any longer, dear child," she said. "Sleep well, and look your prettiest to-morrow. Only remember, Jessie, Colonel Enderby loves you passionately—more deeply than you can measure. Don't disappoint him; don't undervalue his love. Such affection is a great possession to any woman; but it is sensitive, it is easily wounded. Be careful, dear. You will try to please him always, and be a devoted wife to him, won't you?"

The girl passed her hand across her smooth forehead rather wearily.

"Oh yes, of course I shall, Mamma. It would be horribly stupid to do anything else."

And with this somewhat enigmatic reply, Eleanor had to content herself.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MALVOLIO DOES THE HONOURS OF THE VILLA MORTELLI.

FORTUNATELY, the misanthropic views on the subject of marriage expressed by Parker do not obtain at all universally. Quite a large gathering waited in the handsome black and white English church in the Via Goito next forenoon. Most weddings are interesting, and this particular wedding was uncommonly so. It had a halo of romance hanging about it, a savour of the unexpected and improbable. The bride was so young and so ravishingly pretty. The bridegroom, on the other hand, was not at all young; but he was somebody, he had made a name for himself, he dressed well, he looked an eminent gentleman.

People smiled and gossiped good-humouredly.—"Yes, it was romantic. Did she have her gown made here or in Paris? Paris, probably. It fitted miraculously, but it was a little pinched in the trimmings. The pearls were good; and how well they looked against her fair skin—just that warm suggestion of tone in it which is so lovely. Ah!—like that,—everybody hoped all would go well with them, and wondered—for the step-mother was incon-

testably a very striking person—wondered whether there might not be just a little something behind, an explanation, you know, a *dessous-des-cartes?*"

Colonel Enderby was impatient to hurry his bride away, when she came down after the breakfast, dressed for her journey. He turned restive under all this ceremonial and publicity. The staring, the talking, the small compliments that had to be amiably responded to, the general sense of being the hero of a highly amusing and popular comedy, was anything but agreeable to him. The Colonel was both modest and proud. He bore himself extremely well; but he did not in the least wish to extend the period of his ordeal.

"We won't miss our train," he said at last to Jessie, as she stood in the centre of a little circle of friends, in the frescoed *salon* of the hotel.

Certainly the young lady repaid inspection wonderfully well at that moment. The touch of demureness in her delicate grey travelling gown and grey bonnet, and a little assumption of dignity in her manner, only brought her almost infantine prettiness into more telling relief. To Philip Enderby she was wholly adorable, standing there fastening her long gloves, and smiling at the assembled company. As a necessary consequence of that adoration he had the very liveliest longing to get her away from all these people. It seemed to him little short of profanation that any one but himself should venture to gaze at her.

"Yes, it is getting late. You had certainly better start," drawled Bertie Ames.

He moved away, and took up his position by the door of the *salon* as he spoke.

"It would be rather unlucky to begin so immediately by losing something, you know—even if it was only the train to Milan. The losing can very well keep till later."

Jessie went through the inevitable hand-shaking and embracing with calmness and resignation. She paused a moment opposite to her step-mother.

"Good-bye, dear little Mamma, till we meet in England, delightful England," she said brightly.

Then the two women kissed each other.

Tears were in Eleanor's eyes as she pressed Colonel Enderby's hand in hers.

"Ah, my good friend," she said, "I pray God you may be very happy."

Her expression was appealing, and there was a fine intensity in it.

"I am very happy," he replied quietly, as he bowed over her clasped hands; "and I am grateful to you."

"Thank you for that."

"You need not fear but that I shall guard the treasure you have given me very jealously.—You know, you have only to command me at any time, if I can serve you."

Eleanor made a rapid gesture of assent. She felt an immense honour and regard for this man.

Bertie stood by the door, waiting for Jessie to pass out into the great hall beyond. He looked very languid, very gentleman-like, and wore the inevitable gardenia, along with the orange blossom, in the button-hole of his frock coat. As the young lady approached him, a singular thinness and pallor came over his dark face.

"I shall miss my charming little cousin a good deal," he said, taking her hand in his for a moment. "Farewell, Jessie Enderby."

The girl started visibly at the sound of her new name. She gave herself a curious little shake.

"I am glad you will miss me," she answered. Then, glancing up at him quickly, "But you will soon console yourself, Bertie. It will pass; as for that, one does not miss any one very long."

Bertie Ames put up his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are admirably philosophic under all circumstances, Jessie. Yes, decidedly I will do my best to find consolations."

Colonel Enderby, escaping from the affectionate overflowings of Mr. Drake, arrived just in time to hear Bertie's last words. The two men exchanged a not altogether friendly glance, and merely bowed to each other.

Outside in the hall, Jessie turned suddenly to her husband. She passed her hand through his arm, and clung to him with a strange vehemence.

"Philip, will you promise always to be as kind to me as you are now?" she cried.

"My darling," he exclaimed, "what a question!"

He was half pleased, half pained by the girl's earnestness.

"God forbid that you should ever find me one whit less kind. I am not much given to changing, Jessie. I must always love you better, hold you dearer, than life itself."

Philip Enderby's expression was very tender and pathetic as he looked at her.

A little crowd of friends, backed by all the *employés* of the hotel—who could not forbear making the most of this opportunity of sight-seeing and gossip—thronged into the hall after them.

Jessie recovered herself quickly. She had an innate regard for appearances. She passed out to the carriage, brilliant, smiling, and apparently light-hearted as usual.

"*Mon Dieu*," whispered a French chambermaid to the *garçon* near her; "but how young she is, and how pretty! Wait a little, there will be three to the *ménage* one of these days."

Her companion smiled blandly, spread out his hands with an air of wide and varied experience, and replied—

"Ah, one cannot foretell. They are English. The habits of the English are extremely droll."

The hall of the hotel was destined to witness another episode, of a somewhat penetrating character, before the close of Colonel Enderby's wedding day.

Eleanor had arranged to set out on her drive back to the Villa Mortelli about half-past five o'clock. By that time her guests would have gone their several ways; and the traffic on the Corniche road would be less heavy in the evening. A little before the half-hour she came downstairs. The glory of the day was over, and Eleanor had exchanged her wedding finery for one of her ordinary black dresses, with its many crisp pleatings and flouncings. Over it she wore a long, light-coloured coat, to preserve her clothes from the dusty horrors of the high-road.

The excitement, not only of this day, but of the several months, had come to an abrupt termination, and with Eleanor the reaction was already setting in. Her plans had prospered; everything had worked perfectly; she could assure herself, almost without a misgiving, that she had done the best for everybody—for Jessie, for Colonel Enderby, and for Bertie Ames too, in the long run, though at present he might be a trifle slow to acknowledge it: people are so ridiculously blind at times to their own highest good! For herself, she had brought a relation of a difficult and perplexing nature to a happy close; she had extricated herself from a situation which had threatened to become actually tragic. On the face of it, she had every reason for self-congratulation just now. She should have folded her hands restfully, thanked a benignant Providence for past favours, and looked towards the future with confidence and serenity. But in point of fact she did none of these comfortable things, as she came slowly downstairs into the great cool hall,—with its plants and palms in green wooden boxes, and its small army of smiling porters and waiters, lounging about, and staring good-humouredly at the streams of people crossing and recrossing each other on the pavement outside, and at the crowded movement of the broad, sun-blinded square beyond.

Eleanor was tried and worried. She was singularly incapable in the small affairs of daily life. She had been obliged to pack her own trunk and valise—Jessie's maid having departed along with her mistress—and this simple business had caused her considerable embarrassment. She felt cross with Parker; injured at her desertion. And then, too, she had never contemplated this dull, uninteresting space of time, when the old excitement would be over, and no new one would have appeared to take its place.

To do Eleanor justice, I must insist upon the fact that she had looked no further, planned for nothing, beyond Jessie's marriage. That had presented itself to her as the end to be attained, as the supreme solution of all alarms and difficulties. What might happen later, she had but very vaguely imagined. All must then go well, she supposed; but she had shrunk with a creditable instinct from exploring the probabilities of the future, even in thought. It was the nature of the woman to fling herself, with almost hysterical vehemence, in pursuit of a definite object; disregarding consequences, disregarding side issues, with a childish inconsequence. Now, her object being attained, she found herself suddenly face to face with that enigmatical future; and at a moment, too, when she felt particularly ordinary, commonplace, and acutely disturbed by the vulgar details of existence.

A sense of uneasiness and disquiet laid hold on Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay as she waited for her carriage. She looked out at the bright, dusty, picturesque *piazza* for a minute or so, and then turned and glanced towards the door of the smoking-room, in the corridor on the right, from whence she expected Bertie every moment to come and join her. She hated delay. She bit her lip and patted her neatly shod foot on the marble floor with growing impatience.

The hotel-manager, a rotund, middle-aged Italian, blessed with a sleek white face, closely cropped black hair, and an air of indescribable benevolence, came forward, rubbing his fat hands, and bowing profusely.

"He regretted immensely that madame should be kept waiting, but it still wanted some minutes to the hour she had named in her esteemed command for the carriage. He could never sufficiently express his gratitude to madame for her goodness in having selected his hotel as a suitable locality where might be accomplished the interesting event of the morning. Ah! and by the way, Mr. Ames,—the gentleman who had left by the half-past four o'clock train,—had entrusted him with a letter for madame, which he now did himself the honour to present to her. On receiving it he had proposed to permit no delay, to deliver it to

her immediately; but the gentleman had instructed him to wait till madame was leaving."

Eleanor grew nearly as white as the marble quarries under her feet, as she took the note that the beaming Italian held out to her. A great horror came over her, a sudden frightful self-revelation. But she mastered herself. She thanked the florid-mannered manager for his courtesy. The arrangements had been admirable in every particular; they left nothing to be desired.

The man laid one thick white hand upon his wilderness of shirt-bosom, and bowed with speechless fervour.

"Ah! but there was the carriage at last, as madame, no doubt, perceived. In three seconds her baggage would be placed—so. Now might he have the honour of assisting her to enter it?"

She walked out to the carriage firmly, and even contrived to make one or two suitable little speeches to the engaging Italian by the way—which, under the circumstances, was little short of heroic. But her heart was like a stone. She had no need to read Bertie Ames' letter—she knew quite well what was in it already.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay drove through the magnificent Genoese streets, with their solemn splendour of building, and their teeming, restless, charming, grotesque human figures; through the long, arid, straggling suburbs, beyond the fortifications; and out on to the dusty high-road, sitting stiff and upright in the carriage, while the yellow evening sunshine poured down upon and scorched her. The great blue rollers rushed joyously up against the sea-wall on the left, behind the tall narrow warehouses and flat market-gardens, and broke in clouds of snowy foam with a deep-mouthed roar, which might be heard above all the braying of mules, and shouting and swearing of savage-looking drivers, and rattle of wheels, and grate of tramcars on the high-road. Dusty roses hung over the high walls on the right, and richly coloured villas glowed amid the cool glossy green of their old walled gardens. Now and again there was a block of waggons or mule trains, and the carriage drew up for a while in the midst of a struggling, seething mass of straining animals and yelling, lashing human beings.

Ordinarily, Eleanor would have been exceedingly well aware both of the beautiful and repulsive elements in her surroundings; but, as it was, she saw and heeded nothing. She had glanced at the first few lines of Bertie's farewell letter, and a shame, a self-contempt, so scathing had overtaken her that the drama of sea and sky and sunset, of the contrast between the dignity and the brutality of the scene before her, was thin and insignificant compared with the depth of her own emotion.

"Good-byes are unpleasant things," wrote Bertie Ames. "We have had plenty of them already to-day; so, dear Cousin, I venture to spare myself the pain of saying that odious word to you. Of course, I don't for an instant permit myself the impertinence of supposing you contemplated my remaining your guest after to-day. Jessie's presence satisfied *les convenances.* You are too kind to give me my *congé*, but I understand——"

Eleanor read no further. Mistaken, exaggerated, imprudent, even at moments cruel, as she was, the springs of womanly modesty still rose pure and unpolluted within her. She recoiled with passionate disgust and horror. Good heavens! that a man should ever have cause to say such things to her! that she should have been so utterly blind and stupid, in her mad desire to clear the way, to get rid of the obstacle that seemed to interpose between herself and the thing she longed after—as to have ignored the obvious result, and so checkmated herself. She had been too hot-headed, she had played too high, and lost everything, including her own self-respect. And then, in an agony of terror, she began to ask herself whether she might not have compassed the ruin of other lives besides her own?

The only safe thing, after all, is to leave events in the hands of Fate or Providence—say which you will. Directly petty human purpose comes in, trying to modify, or wrest to its own uses, the actions of others, so soon does Nemesis rise up, and follow on after us,—on, on, with ever-nearing footsteps, till the sound of her terrible tread is in our ears, and we feel the awful gloom of her approaching presence. But she may pass us by?—Oh yes; pass us, the sinners, leave us in peace and comfort; pass us to crush, to maim, to mutilate those whom we used so thoughtlessly as tools and puppets. It is easy enough to set the machine of destiny in motion, but once the great wheels are whirring, turning, spinning, no mortal hand is strong enough to stay them again.

The dusk had fallen when the carriage drew up at the front door of the Villa Mortelli. The house looked grim and deserted. A dull light was burning in the bare, cold hall. The driver pulled the bell and drummed on the panels of the half-open door; but the noise he made evoked nothing more substantial than a dreary echo.

Utterly weary and self-abased, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got out of the carriage, and went indoors. In the dimness of the hall, she could perceive but one living creature, one being there ready to welcome her home.

On the low marble pillar, ending the balusters at the bottom of the staircase, sat Malvolio, hunched up together, his wizened

face more wrinkled, anxious, mournful than ever. As Eleanor came in at the door, he craned out his skinny neck, peeping and peering into the darkness behind her, with quick uneasy liftings of the eyelids and eyebrows. He had on the little red tattered jacket in which Bertie sometimes clothed him in cold or rainy weather; while, on the narrow bosom of it, Antonio, with a truly Italian taste for staring incongruities, had pinned a large bunch of orange blossom, tied with a flaring bow of white satin ribbon. When the monkey's quick instinct assured him that his master had not come home too, he turned fiercely on Eleanor, pointing, grinning, chattering at her with impotent malignity. There was a diabolical light in the creature's sad eyes, and something absolutely hideous in its furious gestures.

Eleanor, overstrung and exhausted, could not bear it. She called aloud in terror and agitation; and her voice rang up the cold, white staircase, and through the empty, silent rooms of the little red villa.

"They are all, all gone," she cried, "and I am here alone in this horrible place. He has taken away everything that I love, and you"—she pointed wildly at the monkey—"you are all he has left me!"

Parker, a straight, harsh, grey figure, came down hurriedly from the upper story.

"God help us!" she cried. "What's the matter? What has happened?"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flung her arms round the faithful woman's neck, and burst into a passion of sobbing.

"Ah, my dear, my poor dear lady!" she murmured. "Are there none of them left but me to take care of you? Come away, ma'am, come away! You're worn to death with all this silly turmoil and worry. Come upstairs with me quietly to your room. There, just what I always say; you can't put dependence on any man! That feather-headed old sawney, Antonio, promised me he'd be sure to be here to meet you, and take down the boxes."

CHAPTER IV.

TELLING OF LEISURE, OF LOVE, AND OF A SUNDAY EVENING.

THE afternoon sun was warm on the high red-brick wall; warm on the grey and rusty lichens that encrusted it, and on the hanging plants of toad-flax, with their rosy stems, round, shining leaves and delicate purple and white flowers, that had rooted themselves here

and there among the joints of weather-worn masonry. It was warm, too, on the tall spikes of scarlet lobelia, white wind-flower, and summer chrysanthemum, in the broad border just below; warm on the southern front of the long, low house, with its rough, buff-coloured, stuccoed walls, half hidden under climbing roses, and its wide gables, with their carved clap-boards; warm on the upward stretch of ruddy tiled roof, and the two enormous twisted chimney-stacks above; warm, finally—pleasantly, soothingly, sleepily warm—on Philip Enderby, as he sat in a garden chair on the gravel walk, just in front of the flower-border, with his legs crossed, his hat tilted down over his eyes, and a half-consumed cigarette, the blue smoke-rings of which curled lazily out and up in the still air, between his fingers.

In front of him lay the level green expanse of a tennis-lawn, with bright flower-beds on either hand, ending in a gentle slope of grass, and a space of half-wild ground, such as our forefathers would have termed a pleasaunce,—planted with little thickets of hawthorn, yew, lilac, and laurel, and overtopped by several good oak trees, a couple of feathery larches, and a tall, dark cypress, a trifle lopsided from the force of the westerly winds. On the left stood the house; and on the right, across a sunk fence, was a good-sized meadow. A couple of old stag-headed Spanish chestnuts, whose first withered leaves fluttered slowly to the ground, rose from low mounds above the levels of rich deep grass. The elms in the hedgerows, too, had been lightly touched by the golden fingers of autumn; a yellow bough, here and there, showing like a sudden leap of flame amid the otherwise dense and uniform foliage.

Away beyond the meadow, between the trunks of the further elm trees, were stretches of rolling pasture and gleaming corn-land, with here and there the blue shadow of a wood, or the red roof of a distant cottage or farmstead, breaking the long dark lines of the hedges. And over it all lingered the soft magical haze of the sunny September afternoon, changing the heavy midland landscape into a land of mystery and enchantment, gilding the wings of the gnats as they danced up and down, up and down—a foolish short-lived multitude—in the broad sun shafts, and painting the distance in pearly tones, as tender as the shades on a dove's breast.

Now and then, across the lawn there drifted one of those streeling milk-white gossamers; on which, like a cloud-enthroned angel in a holy picture, with a difference, clinging tightly, with all his many-jointed legs, sits a small spotted brown spider. Looking at him, you wonder how he first contrived to set his fairy boat

afloat on this ocean of warm air; but you may just go on wondering, for no one can answer the question. Only, like some wise Epicurean, careless alike of past and future, calm, and satisfied with that only true possession—the immediate present—the little, brown spider drifts on over flowers, and turf, and fruitful hedgerows, in the pensive autumnal sunshine, he knows not whither.

A congregation of house-sparrows, with short stout legs and hopelessly vulgar figures, chased each other in and out of half a dozen deserted swallows' nests, under the house-eaves, amid much noise and pertinacious chatter. While above, on the coping of one of the twisted chimneys, a respectable cock starling, his beak full of the mutilated remains of a large beetle, stood swearing horribly, anxiously desiring to present this appetizing morsel to his nestful of dirty children, who squealed to him from a cranny in the brickwork close by: and yet fearing to reveal their already far too conspicuous dwelling-place to the Colonel, quietly smoking his cigarette in the garden.

The whole scene was a peaceful and pleasant one, and Philip was quite in the humour to relish it. He had an agreeable sense of physical and spiritual well-being. A long tramp over the stubble-fields yesterday, at Bassett, after partridges, and the mildly soporific influences of a Sunday afternoon, following on a well-spent Sunday morning, produced in him a condition of amiable quiescence, which rendered sitting still there in the sunshine, and looking silently at the garden and the country, the quick glancing life of the birds, and measured movements of the cattle in the meadow, a peculiarly congenial occupation. He felt that the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. He was content; and, good heavens! how very much that means. Life had given him all he had asked for in the last few months, and he was simply fearlessly thankful. Like the philosophic spider, he floated along in a serene untroubled spirit upon his thread of gossamer. The present was surely enough for him. The present just now, indeed, seemed exquisite.

For, to tell the truth, Colonel Enderby's outlook had altered radically since the dreary evening—less than a year ago—when he had waited fruitlessly for his dying father's summons, in the silent house at Bassett Darcy. He had eaten freely of the fruit of love since then; and the taste of it had awakened the hopes, and instincts, and dreams of his early manhood again. It is not for me to say whether this move on his part was a progressive or retrogressive one; I gladly leave the delivering of judgment to others, and stick to my plain business of reporter. Anyhow, it is certain that the Colonel had grown tired of his old occupations—

tired of war, with all its undoubted horror, and somewhat questionable glory; tired of fighting and marching; of the boom of cannon and crackle of musketry: and, still more, tired of peace; of Aldershot and its wide encircling moors, dark with fir trees, and sere with heather; tired of barracks and gossipy garrison towns, of endless military shop and bottomless military grievances; tired, too, of tropic Indian suns and biting Canadian winters; tired, in short, of all the pomp and circumstance of our invincible British army. It would seem that when Colonel Enderby married his charming wife, he somehow divorced his sword. He developed an unconquerable longing to go back home again, to settle quietly down among wide Midlandshire pastures, and to spend his days according to the simple, easy, uneventful pattern common to so many of his forefathers.

A considerable outcry had been raised when Philip announced his intention of leaving the service. His friends declared it was a fatal mistake; that Enderby had still a career before him, if he would only take the trouble to exert himself. Even persons in high places condescended to remonstrate mildly with him. "Colonel Enderby was too good a man to lose; he was so extremely dependable and trustworthy." But Philip had taken the bit between his teeth. There was a vein of sentiment in him, such as makes even the most reasonable and modest of men at times curiously indifferent to public opinion. He went resolutely, some people said obstinately, his own way.

So the Colonel turned his face homewards. He took the Manor House at Broomsborough, two miles out of Tullingworth, and about eight, as the crow flies, from Bassett D'arcy. He rented a small farmstead, and some hundred acres of land; bought a pair of carriage-horses for his wife; proposed to get a couple of hunters before the beginning of the season, if he could afford it; and turned his attention seriously to questions of Cotswold sheep, pig-styes, and fowl-houses.

His brother, Jack Enderby, behaved very nicely at this juncture.

"Farming's simply the most rotten business out, my dear fellow," he said. "Believe me, you might just as soon put your money down the nearest well, or invest it in Egyptians. But if you really mean to go in for that sort of thing, you know, I've got a couple of first-rate short-horns I could let you have. You'll want some good dairy cows—they pay, you know, if you've got your market handy. Pray don't say a word about it—'pon my word, I want to get rid of them—it's not the slightest favour, I assure you. And there's a pretty little Alderney heifer too; beautiful thing, with a head like a deer, and splendid quarters—

you'd better just let me throw her into the lot; she'd please your wife. Ladies like fancy cows, you know; short-horns are a bit too solid for 'em."

Another day Mr. Jack Enderby made yet further efforts towards the supplying of stock.

"I've got some uncommonly good pigs," he said. "You must just have a look at them. Pure Berkshire; you know my father always would keep them. Long and low, no leg to speak of, and a back like a dinner-table—make prime bacon pigs. But there's a prejudice against them in this country. I can't get any sale for them now at Slowby; though in point of fact those ugly tortoise-shell brutes they breed round here can't hold a candle to them. I'll send you over two or three to try. No, my dear fellow, for goodness sake don't thank me. You'll do me a real favour in taking 'em off my hands."

Thus did the Colonel, metaphorically speaking, beat his shield into a ploughshare, and his sword into a pruning-hook; and, as he sat idly watching the gnats dancing in the sunshine on that quiet Sunday afternoon, he was very far indeed from thinking that in so doing he had been guilty of a mistake.

Presently the cock starling—who, after much noisy debate, deciding in favour of a bold policy, had delivered over the remains of the beetle to his hungry nestlings—broke forth into such a torrent of scolding, that Philip, roused from his vaguely pleasant reverie, looked up to see what was the matter. Across the short turf of the tennis-lawn Jessie came towards him.

The young lady had changed but very slightly during the five months that had elapsed since her marriage. She had collected a number of new impressions, and passed through a number of new experiences; but they had failed to leave any very definite traces on the brilliant, highly polished surface of her personality. She still possessed the same gay humour, the same inimitable freshness, the same captivating quality; and Philip Enderby was still wholly devoted to her. He had not got in the least accustomed to her, though he had exchanged the relation of lover for that of husband—an exchange, which, alas! too often takes off the keen edge of a man's interest in a woman. The girl was to him as bewitching as ever. She provoked him into quick attention twenty times a day. He watched her as one watches the flickering reflections of running water on some bank by a stream-side, delighting one with their endless change and motion and joyous sparkle. It must not be supposed, however, that Philip was fatuous about his wife; or that he fell into the tasteless and tiresome habit of praising her in season and out of season; of singing an everlasting

hymn in her honour, and calling upon his friends and relations to join in the chorus. He was both too reticent and too proud a man to do that; and his love for his wife was far too deep and reverent a sentiment to have any inclination for flaunting itself in the face of outsiders. The girl's every word and look had an intrinsic, almost sacred value for him; but there was a vein of jealousy in his tenderness.

Jessie came lightly over the grass. In one hand she held her hat, and in the other a long narrow strip of bright-coloured Indian embroidery, which trailed along the ground after her—the end of it hotly pursued by a small black kitten. If the kitten found satisfaction in this form of entertainment, so, clearly, did its mistress. She drew the long web slowly behind her till the little creature was close upon it, and then, with a sudden jerk, whisked it away out of reach, far above her head.

"Look, Philip, look," she cried, in her clear sweet tones; "how charmingly he jumps;"—while the kitten, in a state of the wildest excitement, all claws and tail, sprung high into the air after its vanishing plaything.

The Colonel got up when he saw her coming, threw away the end of his cigarette, and stood watching her. He thought he had seldom seen anything much prettier than this fair, graceful young woman, turning and twisting hither and thither, within the circles of the gold and crimson embroidered scarf, while the black round-about kitten leapt and darted around her over the sunny grass.

The kitten gave out first. It retired behind one of the poles of the tennis-net, sat down, and began licking its sleek fur with a fine air of indifference, as though nothing so trivial and transitory as the pleasures of a game of play had ever entered its small sooty head. Jessie cast a glance at it.

"Silly little thing," she said, "so soon to be tired."

Then she came on, and stood balancing herself on the edge of the turf, where it bordered the gravel walk. There was a touch of something curiously light and puck-like in the girl's appearance at times. Her face was deliciously merry as she looked up at her husband.

"What shall we do next, Philip?" she said.

Colonel Enderby smiled back at her. She was very irresistible in her inconsequent gaiety and endless readiness for amusement.

"What do you want to do?" he replied. "I am quite ready to obey you."

Jessie put her head a little on one side, and balanced herself daintily on the edge of the grass, swaying slightly from side to side, like a bird before it takes flight.

"Ah! but that is not quite enough," she said. "It will not do to obey merely. You must invent, you must devise, you must imagine."

"My wits are slow," he answered, still smiling. "I am afraid I must leave the inventing and devising to you, Jessie. I have always been better at carrying out orders than at giving them."

"The English Sunday is rather a trying affair," said the girl. "It leaves so little that one can do with impunity—social impunity, I mean. Here, in the country, they seem very old-fashioned on some points; and of course one doesn't want to make one's self different to other people."

Philip laughed. He made a rapid mental survey of the excellent middle-aged wives of his highly conservative neighbours, contrasting them with the young lady before him. The survey proved amusing.

"I am afraid you are different to most people, all the same, my dear little wife, without any making."

Jessie turned away, and began folding together the long scarf that still trailed behind her.

"Bertie used to tell me," she said slowly, "that I was a perfect example of the pagan spirit—that I was a most remarkable survival. It sounds rather well to be a remarkable survival, doesn't it? Is it that which makes me different to most people, I wonder? They are only themselves, I suppose; and I am a sort of re-incarnation."

Colonel Enderby did not in the least relish this somewhat occult strain of meditation. Then, too, the mention of Mr. Ames' name invariably aroused in him antagonistic feelings.

"Come for a walk," he said. "We will go down over the fields to the brook, and take a look at the beasts in the lower meadow."

Jessie put on her hat, and arranged her curly hair under the brim of it.

"Still it would be interesting to know whether I am really a remarkable survival," she observed quietly.

Colonel Enderby came close to the girl.

"Don't call yourself queer names, Jessie," he said; "I don't quite like it. When I said something just now about your being different to most people, I wasn't thinking about pagans or survivals, or any rubbish of that kind——"

"I am not quite sure that it is rubbish, you know," she interrupted, glancing up at him quickly.

"Yes, it is," replied Philip, with a certain insistence. "You are a very beautiful woman, Jessie; and in that there is no denying that you are pretty different to most people. But let us take

ourselves and life too, simply and straightforwardly, darling, without speculating about ourselves, and trying to find out what's hidden. It's a mistake to do that. It makes people get all sorts of nasty unwholesome fancies into their heads: and when those fancies once take hold of them—never mind how untrue they were at the start—they begin to make them true, in a sort of way at least, by thinking so much about them. They begin to grow into that which they have brooded over. Put all that sort of thing away from you, Jessie; it's dangerous."

The Colonel spoke almost in a tone of command. He was a good deal moved; he hardly knew why.

A trace of surprise gathered in Jessie's expression as she listened to him. He had rarely committed the indiscretion of becoming didactic. "Is that all?" she inquired, when he paused.

"Yes," he answered, suddenly growing ashamed of his own eloquence; "that is all. I beg your pardon for preaching you an extempore sermon in this way."

"It was interesting," Jessie said, thoughtfully. "It suits you to be a little excited, you know, Philip. It makes your eyes a splendid colour."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Colonel.

He turned away, half pleased, half embarrassed by his wife's remark. He had always believed that his personal appearance was by no means his strong point; and any comment on it made him feel self-conscious and awkward. In some ways Philip Enderby was almost absurdly simple-hearted still.

"Come for a stroll," he said, after a moment's silence, without looking directly at her. "Let us go down over the pasture to the osier-bed, and I'll get you some of those big reeds with grey tassels to them, you wanted the other day for your jars."

So the two wandered away together in the still warm evening, over the ridge and furrow of the sloping meadow-land, towards the little stream. Philip was very gentle with his wife, very desirous to please her. He got her an armful of boughs, and reeds, and flowers; and told her about the different birds, as they called back and forth to each other from the high branches of the elm trees, or skipped in and out of the shelter of the thick hawthorn hedges. All living creatures had a strange fascination for Jessie; they seemed very near to her; she was never tired of observing them. Philip found himself talking very readily; he had been more pleased, perhaps, than he quite liked to own to himself, by his wife's little compliment; and the sense of pleasure had unloosened his tongue—he was unusually entertaining.

Coming home again up the field path, Jessie walked in front,

her soft pale draperies brushing gently as she moved against the longer grass on either side the way. Down in the west the ruddy orange glow of the sunset lay along the horizon, promising another still, hot day to-morrow. To the east, above the upward sweep of yellow corn-lands, crowned with a line of dark broken wood, the moon rose, large and red, through a broad belt of dun-coloured vapour.

At the top of one of the long swelling ridges the girl stopped and turned round. She had taken off her hat, and stood there with her arms full of bending reeds and flowers, the upper part of her supple figure outlined against the evening sky. The Colonel stood below in the grassy furrow, and looked up at her. She was very fair.

"Jessie," he said, moved by a sudden impulse, "are you happy? Are you glad or sorry you married me, and came away here to England?"

The girl laughed softly.

"I am as happy as the day is long," she answered; "and the days are admirably long here in England. There is plenty to do and see; I like having things going on all the time—little things, unimportant things, nice, cheery, everyday sort of things, you know. Now, this week, for instance, think what a programme! To-morrow, I must go into Tullingworth early, for some odds and ends of shopping—a hat, Philip; but a hat!—a simply ravishing hat! Then, in the afternoon, you drive me over to Melvin's Keeping. It will be rather slow, that garden party; but there is always the hat, *quand même*. Tuesday, you shoot at Claybrooke, and I go to luncheon. Mrs. Mainwaring's manners are delicious; they smell of dried rose-leaves and lavender, like her dresses. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, something;—every day something, though I forget just now exactly what."

She threw back her head and stretched out her arms exultingly, letting the reeds and flowers fall to the ground at her feet.

"Oh, I love this dear world!" she cried; "I love to be alive and young. If only these beautiful days could go on for ever, and I could forget that it must all pass and change! And yet if it did not pass and change, I suppose I should grow terribly tired of it."

Jessie shrugged her shoulders, and turned out the palms of her hands with a cynical little gesture.

"Bertie was right," she went on. "We are bound to get beyond one thing after another. But yet, it is very sad; why can't what is pleasant stay pleasant? Why must it always go on and on and on, in this dreadful way? The winter is coming to eat up

our lovely autumn days; most of the birds will be gone, and those that remain will have turned into poor shivering little beggars. And I shall grow older and older; I shall get not to care for the summer and the sunshine; I shall not be able to be amused; and then at last I shall have to die. It must come——"

In a strong movement of protective love and tenderness, Philip Enderby came up to the girl, put his arm round her, and gathered her close up against him.

"Don't, dearest," he said; "for God's sake, don't talk like that. You're not like yourself, Jessie."

"Oh!" she answered, "it is nothing, really. It will all blow over soon, and I shall forget all about it. I don't often think of what is terrible. Only sometimes it has come over me lately that everything is slipping away, and that every day is a day lost out of my life, and I feel as if I should go mad. I cannot die," she cried; "I will not die."

Philip tried to speak, but she silenced him.

"You are devout; and people who are devout never quite understand, however kind they may be. They tell one about heaven; and, after all, what do they know about it? they have never been there. I want life—this life, which I know. I would rather go on living as an animal, a tree, as that soft, stupid little white moth there, settling down on the grass, than go away somewhere else, I don't know—nobody really knows—where."

She broke away from Philip Enderby.

"Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!" she cried.

"Yes, it is dreadful," said the Colonel, "to hear you speak in this wild way. My dear child, you must stop. I shall have you ill."

He was utterly amazed, almost alarmed for the girl's reason—alarmed, too, at what she said. Life and death, heaven and hell, were matters which he had always taken very simply and faithfully. He was practically acquainted with the two first, and had never seen any reason to question the existence of the two second. To rebel against the fundamental constitution of things seemed to him little short of impious. Then, this sudden outbreak of Jessie's was so entirely unprecedented, so wholly opposed to her generally gay, light-hearted ways, that it fairly confounded him.

"Come home, darling," he said; "come home and try to think about something else. You are very young, you know. When you grow older you'll get to take things more for granted; everybody does."

Jessie looked up with a strange little smile.

"I suppose they do; and perhaps that's the worst of it."

She stooped down and gathered together the fallen reeds and

flowers. "Poor dears! we won't let them die before their time, anyway," she observed parenthetically. Then she turned her face homewards.

Philip walked beside her in silence. This resumption of her ordinary manner was hardly less confusing to him than her violent and causeless emotion.

"I don't know what made me think of all this to-night," she said presently, in her usual clear sweet tones. "It was singular. I rarely think of anything disagreeable."

As Jessie spoke they reached the little gate leading from the meadow before the house into the garden. The Colonel was busy with his own thoughts; he did not find the latch at once.

"Oh, how long you are!" cried the girl, a trifle wearily.

Philip held back the gate for her to go through. As she passed him he looked at her searchingly in the soft half-light.

Jessie turned to him with a smile as bright as the spring morning.

"Poor dear Philip," she said; "you take things too seriously. Now, I get over my troubles in no time. They are gone, vanished —never to return, probably. I mean to have another charming day to-morrow. Oh, don't look sceptical; it's all over! Let us come in at once. I am so hungry; I shall be so glad of my dinner."

This last announcement was sufficiently practical, mundane, and consequently reassuring; but, all the same, Philip did not quite regain his serenity of mind. The completeness of his content had been shaken. The milk-white gossamer no longer drifted free, in happy, aimless fashion, in the warm autumnal sunshine. It was caught by a straggling branch and held captive, while the poor brown spider, his aerial voyage cut short, found himself unexpectedly called upon to reckon with new and slightly incomprehensible facts.—And yet, at the risk of seeming to deal in paradox, I am inclined to assert that Jessie Enderby had never come nearer escaping from the inherent egotism of her nature, and rising to a worthier and higher spiritual level, than in that inconsequent and, to her husband, profoundly disturbing outburst of emotion.

BOOK FIFTH.

IN SUSPENSE.

CHAPTER I.

JESSIE ANSWERS A QUESTION.

It is very far from the desire of the present writer to blow up a trumpet in the new moon, call a solemn assembly, and loudly proclaim the virtue and wisdom of his own generation. We are not better than our fathers; in some ways we are probably a good deal worse. But, life being the highly confusing business that it is, and we ourselves being so pre-eminently unsatisfactory, it is the more incumbent upon each one of us to gather up a few stray crumbs of comfort wherever we can find them. Even the most rooted pessimist admits degrees of density in the universal disorder; sees points of less darkness; perceives here and there a struggle—though that struggle is doomed to be lamentably partial and transitory—towards the evolution of light.

Our elders deplore the disillusioned, unenthusiastic attitude of our generation; its unpleasing clearness of head, hardness of heart, and unlovely ability to take good care of itself. They say romance is dead, the shrines are empty, the gods are broken. We have cast down the image of Serapis, which they set up with so much hope and fervour, and have pointed to the rats scampering out of the body of their fallen idol with profane and idle laughter.

All of which is true, no doubt, in a measure. Only one would like to ask, who, after all, is to blame? You of the last generation bade us be free, hate cant, cease to mistake clothes for the man who wore them, love beauty, cultivate a scientific habit of mind,—and we obeyed you. We ceased to bow blindly before authority; we put a broom through the elaborate cobwebs of many a school and sect; we tried to examine the grounds of our

beliefs, and deal with facts and not with appearances. With acute and patient accuracy, we analyzed your position, and laid a finger upon its inconsistencies and errors. You impressed upon us the duty of tolerance, of being wide-minded; and we are wide-minded to the point of doubting the difference between right and wrong. You begged us to worship pure reason, and cultivate the intelligence; and we have cultivated it to the point of universal confusion—until, in fact, only authenticated idiots, of whom, mercifully, there are still a very large proportion left, have any wholesome compelling, natural instincts to guide them. Women were encouraged to be strong and fearless. They are both; and, Heaven help us! what a graceful and engaging spectacle they are in a fair way soon to present! Men were to abjure their native brutality. In some ranks they have done so, and stand forth a mild molluscous race, but doubtfully capable of fulfilling the command delivered to our first parents, to "replenish the earth and subdue it."

We have obeyed orders; and, alas! to those who gave them the result seems far from a happy one. Yet even here the saddest pessimist, if clear-sighted, may still perceive points of light. The individual, as an individual, independent of his accessories, has become more respected. The distance has narrowed between class and class. Beauty and pleasure are recognized as the right of the many, instead of the exclusive heritage of the few. The so-called masses begin to be taken seriously, instead of being pandered to in public, and in private treated as a joke. More than this, we have got, surely, a greater love of hard, absolute fact. In our loss of respect for personages, for the pomp and show of privileged human beings, every human being has gained in value. We have, each of us, only a certain capacity of reverence and sympathy; and if the said reverence and sympathy are squandered on the pains and griefs—comfortable ones enough after all, in the greater number of cases—of illustrious princes and very obvious heroes, there can be none left over for the "dim common populations;" for the hero in the shooting-coat or white slop and corduroys; for all the Jacks and Toms and ordinary plain-headed folk, who suffer but never rise from the ranks, whose hearts break, who agonize, who die and go out into the great unknown darkness without any court mourning or black borders to the daily papers.

We have gained this, any way—a sad enough knowledge, after all—that Tragedy needs no velvets and sables, no fine speeches, unheard-of miseries, or broad dramatic effects; but that she comes and dwells in pleasant sunny places, sits down at comfortable well-ordered tables, avoids extremes, and manages, quietly yet indis-

solubly and intimately, to associate herself with the average lot of the average man and woman. It is not necessary to get excited about her, to be rampageous or hysterical, or to make an outcry.

The last generation hugged its sorrows, let them fume and strut, was wonderfully interested and self-conscious over them; fancied it perceived a divine intention, and was somewhat puffed up with pride at being selected as a worthy object for the chastisements of the heavenly rod. We have none of these subjective consolations, unfortunately. I do not think we are aware, either, of much surprise or spiritual exultation in the face of trouble. It has grown a little too common in these latter days, and we have grown too quick in detecting its habitual presence, to be disposed to make much fuss about it; though possibly our pain is none the less deep and penetrating, because we have at moments an almost humorous sense alike of its futility and its frequency. What is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander; and in learning the relative value of things, we have had undoubtedly to relinquish a good many active sources of private support and self-satisfaction.

But it is high time to go back and pick up the thread of Philip Enderby's history—a commonplace history enough, I own; yet not unrelieved by moments of pathos, of brilliant hope, and of gallant fighting in the cause of that which seemed to him noblest and best.

One evening, early in the ensuing winter, the fog had risen as usual from the chilly bosom of the clay-lands, clung close to the face of the fields, and wrapped itself drearily round the leafless spinneys. Every twig in the hedges was garnished at the end of it with a quivering drop of moisture, which gradually increased in size till it fell at last with a dull thud to the sodden earth below. The cattle huddled together in corners; and the thick fleeces of the broad-backed sheep looked dragged down with the weight of the wet that soaked them. There is a brooding sullen silence on such days as this which is almost alarming. Nature seems deadened, sluggish, indifferent. There is no wind, no change, no movement; only the gradual swallowing up of dull diffused light by slow oncoming darkness.

Down through the village of Broomsborough—over whose quaint black and white houses the little grey church, with its broad side-aisles, seemed to extend comfortable protecting wings, as of a well-regulated hen over her brood of chickens—two men were riding home after a day's hunting. One of them jogged along cheerily enough, bending forward in the saddle, and holding his elbows high and square, with a considerable assumption of what is commonly called side. The other man, it must be owned,

carried the marks of recent disaster upon him, and looked in rather evil case.

"I don't understand even now how it happened," he said, turning his head stiffly. "The whole thing was over in a couple of minutes. I was underneath and the mare on the top of me before I knew anything about it. That young fellow Colvin rides in a careless, hot-headed sort of way. He was within an ace of being right on to us; and then I think, Drake, it's extremely probable you'd have ridden home alone."

"It was a nasty fall," replied Mr. Drake, nodding his head and screwing up his genial countenance with an air of strong disgust—"uncommon nasty. Good people are scarce, you know, Enderby, and, upon my word, I should go and see Symes or Lanning, or somebody, and get thoroughly overhauled. You must have got a most infernal shaking, if you got nothing worse; and, in my opinion, it's always best to look into that sort of thing at once. One may get all wrong inside, you know, and then there's no end of bother if it's not seen to in time."

Mr. Drake delivered himself of these vague and bewildering physiological opinions with much verve and earnestness.

Colonel Enderby met them lightly.

"Oh, I must be pretty tough by this time of day," he said. "A hot bath and a good sleep, and I shall be as right as a trivet to-morrow. If I see a doctor, he won't be able to tell me half as much as I could tell him, and it'll only frighten my wife."

"I'd rather frighten my wife twenty times over than get myself wrong inside and not know it till too late," responded Mr. Drake, in a tone calculated to carry conviction as to the entire truthfulness of the statement.

"Wait till you've got a wife, and then perhaps you'll change your mind," returned the Colonel.

The observation had a certain finality about it, and Mr. Drake relapsed into uneasy silence, till in the clinging fog and growing darkness the two men turned in at the gates of the carriage-drive leading up to the Manor House.

At the door Drake bundled down off his big hunter, chucked the reins to the waiting groom, and began feeling about the other horse's legs in a knowing and scientific manner.

"William, you'll have to look after the mare a bit to-night," said Colonel Enderby.

He thought it would be easier to give his orders at once before getting out of the saddle.

"She's been down and lamed herself rather badly. I fancy she has strained her off shoulder."

"Very well, sir," replied the groom, with an imperturbable manner and utterly vacant expression of face.

"If you think there's anything much the matter, you had better send over to Tullingworth and tell Oldacre to come out in the morning."

"Very well, sir," said William again.

Philip Enderby set his teeth hard as he got off his horse and on to his feet.

"Bless me, I am stiff," he said.

Indoors, Jessie was lolling rather disconsolately in an armchair in the low-ceiled drawing-room. The room was hot, for she had piled up the fire till it glowed with a great heart of living crimson between the bars of the old-fashioned grate. With that quick sense of taste—taste meaning, I suppose, an accurate reading of the true relation between means and ends—Jessie had put aside all Italian conceptions of decoration, and had filled her English home with full dark colours, had laid down thick noiseless carpets, and hung the windows with glowing, deep-toned stuffs. "It must all look warm and soft," she said; "what you call snug. A house never looks snug in Italy; but there it is different; it is in the grand style. There the idea is to live in a palace, and let in the air and the sunshine. Here it is to live in a burrow and keep out the draughts." Jessie had certainly contrived to give her own particular burrow a most conspicuous appearance of comfort.

The curtains were drawn, and the room lighted by a couple of red-shaded lamps; on the girl's lap, as she sat in front of the great fire, was her kitten, curled round, with his shiny black nose pillowed on one ebony paw, in an attitude of profound repose. A piece of work and some books lay on the floor by her side; but just now Jessie appeared to be doing nothing. In point of fact, she had been dozing peacefully, and only woke up—with a troubled little start—when Philip's footsteps came slowly through the ante-room, and he opened the drawing-room door.

"Are you all right, Jessie?" he said, waiting in the doorway, and not offering to come further into the room.

"I believe so," she answered sleepily, without moving, except to put up one hand languidly and stifle a little yawn.

Something in his wife's tone did not quite satisfy the Colonel. He came on across the room, and stood behind her chair, leaning his hands on the back of it.

"Nothing wrong, dear little woman?" he asked, looking kindly down at her half-averted face and charming figure.

Jessie shrugged her shoulders.

"What would you have, Philip? I have been alone all day.

The weather has been unspeakable. No one has been near me but the maids and Berrington. One is not intimate with one's butler, you know, and English maids have no conversation. I have been bored—ah! but bored. I try to read—one book is sillier than another. I try to play; but there is nobody to listen. Finally, Mimi, here, went to sleep on my lap. Cats possess a mesmeric quality; I went to sleep too. It was a relief, but it was hardly amusing."

"Dear me, what a dismal little history!" said Philip, smiling. "However, you see, I'm home now, and Drake's come too, to dine and sleep; so you'll have somebody to talk to besides the maids and the kitten."

"Mr. Drake doesn't like me." The girl spoke quickly.

"Drake's a fool, then," returned her husband. "But what on earth put that idea into your pretty head? Drake thinks just what everybody else does about you."

He sighed slightly as he spoke. Sometimes the Colonel wondered whether certain people did not think about his wife just a little bit more than they ought.

"No, he has never liked me," she repeated. "It began long ago, before we were married. I dare say he could not tell why, but I am certainly antipathetic to him."

Philip slipped his hand down off the back of the chair, and laid it for a minute on the girl's shining hair.

"What a magnificent word!" he said. "I doubt if poor dear old Drake could even spell it. Now I must go and get myself decent for dinner. Will you get up and give me a kiss, Jessie?"

Colonel Enderby made his request humbly. He still approached his wife more in the reverent spirit of the lover, than in the secure and somewhat over-possessive one common to the British husband.

"Ah, will not that little ceremony keep, Philip? It isn't time to go and dress yet. I am so comfortable like this, and I don't want to disturb the cat."

Philip had a momentary inclination to consign the cat—in words, at least—to very warm quarters. He raised himself up suddenly from his leaning posture on the back of the chair. In doing so he was aware of such a keenly distressing physical sensation, that he could not help crying out. Jessie jumped up hastily, pushing the black kitten down on the floor with most unceremonious haste. She faced round on her husband.

"What is the matter with you, Philip?" she cried. "Ah, go away—you look terrible!"

The Colonel's breath came short and painfully. He bent forward again, and leaned his hand heavily on the back of the chair.

"Poor dear child," he said, "I am awfully sorry to have frightened you. I'm all right—only a bit stiff and shaky. Everybody is, more or less, you know, after a long day."

"I do not like this hunting in the least," Jessie exclaimed. "You are out all day, and it is very dull. You come home late, and look extraordinary; also, you get remarkably dirty. It is a sport for savages, I think, not for gentlemen."

"Say all that to Drake, at dinner, and see how he answers you."

Philip spoke with a faint attempt at humour. He slowly straightened himself up again. His face was curiously pale, and had a drawn look upon it. Jessie did not come any nearer to him, nor offer to help him. She stood aside, and watched him with remarkable carefulness and attention. Her smooth white forehead contracted as she did so.

"You are not going to be ill, Philip?" she said in a low voice.

"No, no, of course not," the Colonel answered quickly and cheerily. "I'm all right; I'm as sound as a bell, really—just a bit tired and knocked about this evening, you know; but nothing to matter, nothing for you to worry yourself about."

He came over to the place where the girl was standing, took her hand, and looked at her for a moment with a strangely wistful expression.

"Do you care for me enough to mind very much whether I am ill or not, my beautiful young wife?" he said slowly.

Jessie looked back frankly, sweetly, as she spoke.

"I care for you very much, Philip; but I dislike illness. Mamma used to want me to go with her and visit poor sick people, when we were in Florence. At certain seasons Mamma was beautifully charitable. She would put on atrocious old gowns, and give everything away, and come home crying. It was very charming of her, wasn't it?"

"And did you go with her?" inquired Colonel Enderby.

He felt a sudden anxiety as to the tenor of Jessie's answer.

"Oh no," she replied. "How could I? I never go near people who are ill and may die. It is so distressing. One should only see people when they are well, and agreeable, and at their best. It is too much to ask one to see them when they have become—well, distasteful—I think. For the doctors and nurses, of course, it is different. It is their profession. But I dislike any one to be ill; it is frightening."

Philip Enderby turned somewhat sick. He fixed his eyes on the floor, and fitted his foot uneasily into the pattern of the carpet. They were rather a singular couple, standing there, before the

glowing fire, amid the dim rich comfort of the pretty room. The girl, with her fresh dainty dress, and radiant youthful beauty; and the serious-looking, middle-aged man, in his top-boots and muddy hunting-coat, holding her delicate hand.

"A lot of things happen that we don't very much like, my pretty one," he said gently and sadly at last. "We must make up our minds to that. Only be sure of this, Jessie—nothing you don't like shall ever come near you as long as I can prevent it."

He stooped towards her and kissed her lips.

"There, smooth all those lines out of your forehead. It's not your business to look troubled yet awhile. Leave that to those who are older and duller than you."

Jessie raised herself to her full height, and gave her husband a quick little trembling kiss in return.

"Philip, you are delightful," she said. "I have the greatest confidence in you. Now I will go and dress. I have a new gown. It fits to perfection. Even Mr. Drake must admire me in it. Bertie Ames always contrived, even on the days of neuralgia, to develop a compliment in honour of my new gowns."

"Never mind about Mr. Bertie Ames. He's far enough off now, anyhow. Go and get ready for dinner."

Jessie moved away.

"Ah! Bertie had his good qualities, though," she said, looking back as she went out of the door. "At times he was extremely entertaining."

When Colonel Enderby was left alone, he stood still for some minutes longer.

"Upon my word, I think Drake was right, and that I'd better see Symes. It was an uncommonly awkward fall. I'm half afraid, after all, there's something wrong."

He pressed his lips firmly together, and pulled first at one side and then at the other of his thick moustache.

"I shouldn't care a rap," he added, "if it wasn't for her."

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW OF A GREAT FEAR.

Everybody, I imagine, has a shrinking from putting questions which may lead, in reply, to the communication of unpleasant truths. Colonel Enderby did not go next morning to consult Dr. Symes. The weather for some days was wet and winterly, so he stayed at home with his charming wife, and thought, or tried to

think, himself better. The stiffness, indeed, wore off to a great extent; and the bruises came out, as honest wholesome bruises should do, in various and sundry colours; and there, the Colonel hoped, would be the end of the whole matter.

His mental horizon was very fairly unclouded again about a week after his accident, and he began to entertain a contempt for his own pusillanimity in having given way at first to serious alarm. The weather had mended somewhat, and Colonel Enderby spent the first fairly fine afternoon looking round the farm, and superintending, in company with Essex, his farm-bailiff—a short, square-made, moon-faced man, rather weak about the knees—the doctoring of a bullock, down at a hovel in one of the outlying pastures, whose condition seemed to demand a vast expenditure of that unsavoury fluid commonly known as oils.

"If them red iles don't pull 'im through, nothing will, sir:"—after which comforting assertion of the attainment of the possible extreme of all human endeavour, the bailiff, stick in hand, and bob-tailed sheep-dog behind him, set off at a shambling walk towards the little red farmhouse, two fields away to the left, standing surrounded by its pale thatched ricks and dark buildings.

The Colonel was rather chilled, with waiting in the wet and slush outside the cattle-shed. He wanted to warm himself, and to get home quickly; he had been out later than he intended. Jessie might be lonely without him. He started up the rising ground of the pasture at a good smart pace. Some rooks, disturbed in their search for worms in the spongy turf between the ridges, spread their broad black wings, and flapped up reluctantly in front of him, to settle again a few yards further away, with quaint solemn hoppings, and recommence their investigations. The barking of the sheep-dog, and bleating and scampering of the sheep, as he hustled them down into a corner to be counted, came over from the next meadow, through the thick misty air.

Half-way up the long grass slope, Philip slackened his pace, and gave himself two or three good hearty thumps on the left side of his chest with his fist. He had got a nasty heavy aching there, and an odd sensation of difficulty in breathing. It was certainly exceedingly disagreeable; and the thumping did not mend matters appreciably. By the time he reached the top of the hill, and came to the gate opening into the road, just opposite the Manor House entrance, Colonel Enderby was suffering so acutely that he had to wait for a minute or two before he could recover himself sufficiently to cross the road and go on up to the house.

Once indoors, he turned into the dining-room, and sat down on the nearest chair. Berrington, the Colonel's old soldier-servant,

now promoted—rather against Jessie's wish, for she could not get over the fact that his face was somewhat scarred with the small-pox—to the post of butler, moved about the room, arranging the table. The Enderbys had a little dinner-party that night. Jessie's little dinners were admirable. The squire and Mrs. Adnitt, with their youngest girl, Lucy, were coming over from Lowcote; Jack Enderby and Augusta from Bassett Darcy—Augusta Enderby, by the way, was an Adnitt, the eldest of that numerous family; Mr. Drake would drive out from Tullingworth to dine and stay the night; and finally, Ashley Waterfield, Lord Sokeington's brother, and his wife were coming—he took a house at Bashford a year ago, when he left the Guards, and got the adjutancy of the South Midlandshire Volunteers, and married the American, Miss Mamie P. Wrench, whose gowns and good looks made her something of a reputation in London for a couple of seasons. This lady had struck up a species of friendship with Jessie, based on the prolific subject of clothes, concerning which she was apparently willing to talk for quite unlimited periods.

Colonel Enderby sat down on the nearest chair, and leant forward—the position seemed to give him a measure of relief—with his elbow on his knee, and his chin resting on his hand. He felt wretchedly ill, nervous, shaken, partly by the actual pain, partly by the fear of what the pain might imply. He told Berrington to get him some brandy-and-soda, rather to that silent and fierce-looking person's surprise; for the Colonel was not given to "drinks" at odd hours.

After a time the pain subsided. He managed to get through the evening very creditably; though it was something of an effort to listen with intelligent sympathy to good Mrs. Adnitt's parochial woes; or to Mrs. Waterfield's remarkably voluminous information regarding her own tastes, habits, mental and physical idiosyncrasies, and those of her friends and relations, delivered in a high staccato, with the habitual communicativeness of her nation.

When at last the other guests had departed, and he found himself alone with excellent little Mr. Drake, in his comfortable smoking-room, a long silence fell on Philip Enderby. He stood with his back to the fire, with anything but a happy expression on his face.

"It's a pity that Mrs. Waterfield's got such an appalling, screechy way of talking," observed Mr. Drake presently, throwing himself back in his chair, and extending his feet towards the blaze. "I like a woman who's something to say for herself, you know; but, upon my word, she keeps going at a rate that fairly does for me. Seems as if she was wound up somehow, and let off with a spring. Yah! it goes through one's head like a steam-whistle."

Philip pushed his hands into his pockets, put one foot upon the fender, and leant his shoulders back against the mantelpiece.

"Mrs. Waterfield—oh yes!" he said. "She's a good-looking woman, but there is altogether too much of her for my taste."

He paused, raised one hand, and rubbed it slowly through his hair.

"You're always so kind and affectionate, Drake, I don't mind telling you I am rather in trouble to-night. I dare say it's nothing of importance, but I'm afraid I haven't quite got over that fall. I had such a nasty turn when I was out this afternoon; I can't make out what it means."

Mr. Drake sat up, his genial florid countenance full of kindly sympathy.

"I believe I'd much better have taken your advice, and consulted somebody at once. I'll drive you in to-morrow morning, and go to Symes afterwards. He's the best man, I suppose?"

"Excellent man—first-rate man. Talks too much like a book, you know; but knows his business. Well, as I said from the first, you ought to be thoroughly overhauled, Enderby. I see a doctor myself once every three months or so, on principle. Get a clean bill of health, don't you know. It saves no end of bother and anxiety."

If the speaker's personal appearance might be taken in evidence just then, one would certainly have supposed that he had reduced his private share of bother and anxiety to a minimum.

After a few minutes Colonel Enderby spoke again, with perhaps a studious air of saying something quite by the way.

"You'll excuse my asking you not to mention anything of this before Mrs. Enderby. I dare say it's nothing of importance, and of course I don't want to alarm her."

"No, no; exactly. I understand; of course not," returned the other man, leaning over sideways, and flicking off the ash of his cigar into the grate. "You need never be afraid of my letting cats out of bags, you know, Enderby. I'm the safest man in the world. If there's one thing I flatter myself I can do, it is holding my tongue."

And in this case, notwithstanding his proclivities towards gossip, Edmund Drake was as good as his word.

The dog-cart was standing at the door next morning, and Drake, having made his adieux, was fussing prodigiously in the hall over his coats and other impedimenta, when Philip went back into the drawing-room, to take a parting look at Jessie.

The Colonel was still in that initial stage of married life in which a man does not care to go out, even for an hour, without wishing his wife good-bye first. The habit is a pretty and whole-

some one. For my part, I should be glad to see it last always, from the golden Jemmy and Jessamy period, right on to the quiet gray days of Darby and Joan.

"It is rather a nuisance your having to take tiresome little Mr. Drake into Tullingworth this morning," Jessie said, in a slightly injured tone. "Augusta asked me to go over to Bassett last night. There's no fog to-day. I should so like to drive. Must you go?"

Jessie stood just in front of her husband. She began twisting about one of the buttons on his great-coat with her right hand, putting her head on one side, and looking up in his face meanwhile with a fascinating air of entreaty.

"The horrible fog has kept me in for nearly a week," she said. "Think of that."

It is never very disagreeable to a man to be coaxed by a pretty woman after this fashion. In his present anxious state of mind, Colonel Enderby was peculiarly open to the charm of his wife's little caresses.

"I must go," he replied, "because I promised Drake to drive him in, you see. But I'll be back as soon as possible. Have luncheon at one sharp, and then there'll be plenty of time to get over to Bassett afterwards. I ordered the cob this morning on purpose that you might have the horses in the afternoon, if you wanted them."

Jessie moved a step back, and regarded her husband critically.

"That is rather a good coat, Philip. I like you. You look very attractive to-day, somehow."

Perhaps it was very foolish, perhaps it was slightly pathetic, but at that moderate commendation the serious middle-aged soldier —who, by the way, had quite a number of decorations laid away in a drawer upstairs, the witnesses of gallant deeds—flushed like a girl with pleasure.

It is not wise to love another frail, faulty human creature as completely as Philip loved his wife. Yet which of us in our secret soul has not a sneaking admiration for such love; an underlying belief that, though it be an exaggeration, and a very provable act of folly, it is also more truly divine than the cold calculations of scientific, well-trained intelligence can ever be? Love on, then, dear fools! and we wise critics, while we stand safe on shore, replete with the conviction of our own immense good sense, and watch you drifting towards inevitable shipwreck and destruction, may still—who knows?—sigh a little enviously in secret, when nobody is looking, remembering that you, at least, have really lived, even though you have suffered; while we, perhaps, have done no better than play at living, after all.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL ENDERBY MAKES HIS CHOICE.

"OF the existence of organic disease," said Dr. Symes, with his generous fulness of utterance—"of the existence of organic disease, from a period considerably anterior to the unfortunate event of last week, we have, I think, conclusive proofs. The acutely painful sensations experienced by you yesterday, Colonel Enderby, are sufficiently accounted for by the pre-existence of that diseased condition of the heart, and by the very severe shock to the nervous system consequent on your accident. You apprehend some distinct injury sustained at the moment of your fall, and of your horse rolling on you. You tell me you seemed to feel 'something go here'"—laying his hand on his left breast. "On that point I cannot speak positively at present. Only time and observation will enable me to satisfy myself fully whether or not there is further lesion. You may ask me why, if, as I assert, organic disease was already existent, you were not conscious of it sooner? I reply that an affection of certain vessels of the heart may be present for a lengthened period of time, without causing any serious inconvenience to the patient; and that, as in the present case, a train of entirely accidental circumstances may lead to discovery. In other cases, it may happen that this discovery is not made till—though valuable to the medical adviser from the point of view of evidence—it has entirely ceased to be of moment to the patient himself."

"You mean that it's serious, then?" said Colonel Enderby, briefly.

He sat resting his elbows on his knees, and looking fixedly into the crown of his hat, which he had picked up off the table, and held in his two hands.

"I cannot, I regret to say, deny that it is serious," replied the doctor.

There was a silence. Presently Philip spoke again, slowly—

"I should like to know two things. First, what the immediate consequences are likely to be; and next, what you advise me to do."

"The immediate consequences, my dear sir, are, in great measure, contingent on your following my advice."

Philip glanced up quickly at the speaker.

"You must forgive my putting it plainly, but I hold every man knows his own business best. You may give me advice I can't follow. I must be the judge of that."

"Ah! my dear sir," returned Dr. Symes, blandly, "do you know that you promise to be rather an impracticable patient? We medical men are autocrats; we are judge and jury in one. We do not recognize the right of private judgment for an instant. It would be fatally subversive of our authority."

After making which decent protest, Mortimer Symes leaned back in his chair, with a fine professional smile, threw one leg over the other, folded his arms, and cleared his throat. The excellent man did not want to hurry matters. He felt a good deal for his patient. He had been very much taken with Colonel Enderby when he had met him the year before at Bassett, at the time of old Matthew Enderby's death. Since then he knew that the Colonel had made a romantic marriage. These facts, taken in connection with the subject of the present interview, made him hesitate before speaking his whole mind. His imagination was quick. He shrank from inflicting mental pain, just as, in professional matters, he shrank, unless it was absolutely necessary, from resorting to the use of the lancet and the knife.

Philip became acutely sensible of his companion's hesitation. He looked up again with a brief smile.

"You needn't mince matters, you know," he observed quietly. "I don't think I'm what is called nervous."

The doctor waved his hand, as though dismissing all such derogatory suggestions to the ends of the earth.

"My dear Colonel Enderby," he said, "believe me, I am always scrupulously truthful, when I can venture to be so with safety, to my patient. In your case, I perceive that I can venture to be entirely truthful. I should be making a very poor return for the confidence you have done me the honour to repose in me, I should indeed be treating you with very mistaken kindness if I attempted to speak lightly of your present regrettable condition."

Philip winced. He had that instinct of pride which gives many strong and healthy men a sharp sense of humiliation, almost of disgrace, in the face of physical infirmity. He kept his eyes fastened on the floor, and began slowly stroking and pulling his moustache with his left hand.

"It would be highly reprehensible in me not to put strongly before you the gravity of the position."

Dr. Symes paused a moment.

"You must be extremely careful for a time. To begin with, I am afraid you must deny your taste for sport, and give up hunting for the remainder of this season."

"Oh, that's easily done!" said Philip, with an air of relief.

"That, I fear, is only the first of my unpalatable suggestions,"

continued the doctor, with an attempt at lightness. "Nature, Colonel Enderby, Nature has a marvellous power of adjusting herself within certain limits—of squaring her accounts, so to speak, even with disease. But her dictates must be obeyed scrupulously. She must be given time; be given encouragement; be met half-way. Her suggestions must be treated with reverent attention. In the present case, making myself the mouthpiece of our universal mother—if the phrase may be permitted me—I say that Nature prescribes rest. Rest is absolutely necessary for the establishing of an accommodation throughout the organism to morbid alterations. Rest is equally essential to the nervous system, as the only adequate means of enabling it to recover from the serious shock lately sustained. What do I mean by rest? Briefly this: a careful abstinence from all physical exertion; an equally careful avoidance of anything calculated to produce mental excitement; a relinquishing of all active employment for a time; and submission to the conditions—trying ones, I admit—of an invalid life. In everyday parlance, my dear Colonel Enderby, I must entreat you to go home and go to bed; and, moreover, to remain there till I can sanction your getting up again."

Philip rose, walked across to the fireplace, and stood there, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, and shading his eyes with his hand. This movement, notwithstanding his very real sympathy with his patient, gave Mortimer Symes, it must be owned, a moment of lively anxiety. He was a *connoisseur* in eggshell china, and close to the Colonel's elbow were some of his most valuable, and, consequently, most brittle specimens. They were in imminent danger, for the latter was evidently not in a humour to consider very carefully whether his action might imperil the integrity of such mere frills and fringes on the skirts of æsthetic civilization.

A horrible dread, which he dared not put into words, which mentally he pushed away from him with an agony of denial and repudiation gathered and deepened, and threatened to overwhelm Philip Enderby. His wife's face—with its strange intensity and concentration of purpose—as she had asked him, amid the grace and comfort of her pretty room, whether he was going to be ill, came before him with a weight of meaning, with a suggestion of sinister possibilities that almost unmanned him. What had she said? That it was too much to ask one to like sick people; that they became distasteful, and should, in short, be put out of the way; their existence was a blot, an offence, an outrage upon the fair face of life. How, then, could he go back to her, within an hour, and say, not "The sun is shining; we will go out and amuse

ourselves;" but, "My dear, I am ill; I am going to bed for an indefinite period, and you have got to nurse me"? It was impossible.—Philip had a sickening sense that the very foundations of his happiness were crumbling beneath him. He turned almost fiercely upon the doctor.

"I can't follow your advice," he said. "What's the alternative?"

"The alternative? Ah! there—one moment, excuse me," cried the other gentleman, advancing with remarkable alacrity, and extending a protecting hand towards his cherished eggshell. "A thousand pardons, but it was nearly falling; a unique specimen too, unreplaceable. The alternative, Colonel Enderby? I fear it is a sufficiently distressing one. In all probability a frequent recurrence of your sufferings of yesterday, increasing in intensity, and in gravity of import. I must remind you that acute pain—I know by experience that I am not guilty of exaggeration, and I trust I need not accuse myself of inordinate cowardice—is extremely difficult to bear with calmness and resignation. It is irritating; I had almost said demoralizing."

Dr. Symes paused. The momentary fierceness had faded completely out of Colonel Enderby's face. He looked full at his companion with a thoughtful, questioning simplicity, which left the latter a trifle uncertain as to whether he felt the more disposed to laugh or to weep, as Philip said—

"Yes, I understand. It's not pleasant; but I suppose I shall be able to put up with it."

"That is not all, though, my dear sir, I regret to say." Mortimer Symes spoke gravely and quietly. "Suffering arising from the causes I have described to you is of a peculiarly agonizing character, and, if you are determined to know the whole truth, it is almost certain to terminate fatally."

Philip Enderby stood looking down at the floor for a minute or two in deep thought. Then he threw back his head with a sharp, half-angry shake.

"I must take the risk," he said.

"Ah! pardon me," cried Dr. Symes, "but positively I must expostulate with you. This is simply suicidal, Colonel Enderby. Rest and care, for a time, may restore you to a very fair measure of health."

"On your own showing something's hopelessly wrong. I could never be the same man again. No, no; I'm afraid it won't do."

Dr. Symes was deeply interested. He ventured one step further.

"My dear sir," he said, "consider. What right have you to

chance the throwing away of a valuable life with this reckless indifference?"

The Colonel bowed with a certain dignity.

"Pardon me," he replied, "I have reasons for my action which I am not in a position to explain."

Then he moved across to the table, and picked up his hat and gloves again.

"I am very much indebted to you for being so open with me," he went on civilly. "I must get you to patch me up as well as you can, Dr. Symes, since I don't see my way to lying by just at present. A man of my calling and habits has a foolish hankering not to give in and own himself beaten, you know—to die in harness, as the saying goes. I will beg you to do me one more kindness, by the way, namely, to regard this conversation as strictly confidential."

Some ten minutes later Philip Enderby found himself standing on the doorstep of Dr. Symes' residence. He regarded the broad clean roadway before him, and the trees and bushes inside the iron railings, forming the centre of the square, with curiously awakened attention. He watched William turn the dog-cart at the further end of the square, and stop the handsome cob neatly and accurately against the curbstone at Dr. Symes' door, with the sense of a man over whom a great change has come, who sees familiar objects with new eyes, and, as it were, for the first time. Henceforth Philip believed that a strange and painful presence would rise with him every morning; stay by him all day long; sit beside him at every meal; lie down to rest with him at night. At moments he knew that he would be called upon to bend every energy to conceal this hateful presence from the eyes of others, specially from the eyes of his beautiful young wife. The Colonel did not attempt to juggle or deceive himself, to soften down the edges of cruel fact. He looked his new companion steadily in the face; he wished to get accustomed to this fresh element in his life as quickly as possible. He had made his choice freely and irrevocably as he leant on the chimney-piece in the doctor's consulting-room.

There was a fine expression in Philip's blue eyes just then. He looked like a man who has taken a great resolution, and who walks forward, calm, undismayed, almost exultant, to meet his fate. Such hours are very splendid. They are touched with a magnificent daring and exaltation. But, alas! the measure of a man's true worth is not to be found in the sudden conception of an heroic idea; but in the carrying out of that idea, consistently, faithfully, through slowly accumulating days and months, even,

perchance, years, when the glory has faded from the undertaking, when the freshness and the bloom have departed, and when the quick inspiration of an illuminated moment has passed into the silent continuous habit of a life.

When the Colonel, on his return home, entered the panelled hall of the Manor House, Jessie, ready dressed for her drive, was coming downstairs. The thin, delicate sunshine of a winter's day filtered in through the large heavily mullioned window on the turn of the staircase; warmed the full deep brown of the polished oak steps and banisters; and lighted up the girl's graceful richly clothed figure—projecting her shadow down over the stairway and across the intervening space of floor almost to her husband's feet. He stood still, and watched her as she came down, buttoning her long gloves, and smiling in her wonderfully radiant way.

This was a day of acute mental experiences with our friend the Colonel; and at this moment the experience took the form of a vivid reminiscence. He remembered accurately his first vision of Jessie, on the terrace of the little Italian villa, her simple cotton gown dyed rosy red in the shade of her great umbrella, her eyes dancing with charming vivacity, and the ugly chattering monkey by her side. There was the same effect of innocence, of frankness, of entire composure about her then as now. It came over Philip, with the force of a sudden revelation, that Jessie had not altered in the smallest degree in the last nine months; whereas he——? Alas! there was a whole age of difference between the comfortable middle-aged bachelor, who, in admirable bodily health, freedom of mind, and serene immunity from all extremes of desire, had driven—so unwillingly—those few scorching miles out from Genoa; and the man, who, now, with his heart torn between a passion of love and a black nameless fear, stood watching the fair brilliant woman, coming downstairs towards him. Jessie appeared like some embodiment of the spirit of life at that moment, triumphant in the strength of her youth and beauty.

"The sunshine does me good," she cried, throwing up her head and laughing. "It is a poor, second-hand sort of sun you have here in England; still, even so, it is delightful, after that abominable fog and darkness. I mean to have a charming afternoon. It is excellent of you to be home so punctually, Philip."

Her tone changed suddenly.

"You look very serious," she added. "Is anything wrong?"

By sheer force of will the Colonel pulled himself together.

"You look very pretty, and there is nothing wrong."

Perhaps Jessie detected something strained in the lightness of

the answer. She observed her husband attentively. Just then Berrington set open the dining-room door.

"Luncheon's ready, sir," he said, as he came forward to help his master off with his great-coat.

The meal was rather a silent one; Philip had not much appetite. As soon as the man-servant went out of the room, he left his place, and, drawing a chair forward, sat down by his wife's side at the head of the table. She turned to him gaily.

"It is going to be a delicious afternoon. The carriage ought to be round almost directly."

Philip looked very earnestly at her. Her face was wonderfully pure and childlike under the sweeping lines of her somewhat fantastic hat.—The young lady, by the way, had a remarkable gift of effective and picturesque dressing.

"Look here, Jessie," he said, "you like presents, and I don't believe I've given you anything for ever so long. There, hold out your dear little hand. I brought you home a fairing from Tullingworth this morning. You must wear it always, and, whenever you look at it, let it speak to you of my love."

As he spoke, the Colonel slipped a thick pearl ring on the girl's outstretched finger.

Jessie first looked down at the ring, and then up at her husband.

"Ah, it is ravishing!" she cried, in accents of genuine pleasure. "'Always' is rather a tremendous word, though, Philip; it seems to mean so much."

Then she fell to admiring her ring again.

Colonel Enderby smiled sadly.

"Perhaps my love for you means a good deal too," he said. "Jessie, listen. Let this ring be what is called a token to you.—You know, we can't quite tell what may happen; we can't see on into the future. If ever things go a little wrong, if I seem dull and silent at times, and don't quite please you—this is to remind you that, whatever comes, my love for you is absolute, unwavering, the strongest, truest, deepest purpose of my life.—Jessie, darling, sweet wife, promise you will never doubt me."

He had spoken quietly enough at first; but with the last few words his voice trembled and broke. Jessie stared at him with a growing expression of alarm.

"Something is the matter, Philip," she cried, shrinking away from him—"something is the matter! Oh, don't let me be disappointed—don't let it all get sad. I can't bear what is sad."

Certainly, as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had felt, there was something strangely baffling and perplexing at moments about this

glittering young creature—something almost inhuman in her wild dismay at the touch of the sterner aspects of existence.

She clasped her hands with a swift passion of entreaty.

"Oh! tell me there is nothing the matter, Philip," she pleaded. "It is so cruel to let me be frightened. I was so happy, and now it seems all spoilt."

Colonel Enderby was at his wits' end. He was frightened too, in a way; but he took the girl's two hands in his, and soothed and petted her, saying something, anything, he did not care what, so long as he could banish that strange look of dread from her face, and ring of unreasoning terror from her utterance.

After all, the Colonel and his wife drove over to Bassett Darcy that afternoon. The sharp trot of the horses, the keen frosty air, the pale, winter sunshine, the rapturous but respectful greeting of Jack Enderby's squadron of cheerful children—who regarded their captivating young aunt much as a company of plain but liberal-minded sparrows might regard some gorgeous tropic bird suddenly alighting among them—did much to restore Jessie's ordinary gaiety.

At home, in the evening, after dinner, she sat down at the piano, and played softly, wandering from one plaintive melody and harmony to another, with a sort of regretful accent in the progression of sweet sounds. Philip was desperately tired. He lay down on the broad low sofa, at right angles to the fireplace, closed his eyes and listened.

Yet he had really got through the day better than he could have expected; he had had no serious return of pain. The horses had pulled coming home, at starting, and the exertion of holding them had made him feel queer for a little while; but, fortunately, they had quieted down again after passing Stony Cross and turning down that long, rough bit of road by Wood End, just before you reach Lowcote village. Jessie's playing, meanwhile, was very soothing. Philip made a return upon himself. He began to feel more hopeful; to wonder if his sense of the gravity of the situation had not been exaggerated. Doctors overstate danger so often; they take unnecessarily gloomy views. They are so constantly in the presence of disease and death, that their minds naturally overstep the exact limits of a case. They see more than is really there. No doubt Dr. Symes had done this.

Jessie rose at last from her station at the piano, and coming quietly across the room, sat down on the floor at her husband's side, and leaned her fair head back against the end of the sofa.

"Ah, that is nice!" she murmured gently.

To Philip his wife's simple exclamation gave a delicate sensa-

tion of security and repose. He reached out his hand, and placed it on the girl's two hands as they lay open on her lap. She acknowledged his silent caress, with a pressure of her cool round finger-tips.

Like all true lovers, the Colonel was given to look at his mistress's actions through a very strong magnifying-glass, and find in them all sorts of subtle and precious meanings, by no means perceptible to the casual observer. Jessie was almost always gracious and good-tempered, and what may be called superficially affectionate. She was perfectly ready to receive practical assurances of her husband's devotion, if they were offered with taste and discretion, and at a convenient season; but she rarely took the initiative. Perhaps a man with a wider experience of the capacities of the feminine nature might have complained a little, and accused her of having given, by her looks and bearing before her marriage, a promise of passionate feeling which she was somewhat slow to redeem. Philip's experience, however, was not extensive. He was contented to worship humbly at the shrine; to pay his vows devoutly, without any strong sense that benefits should be reciprocal. If the Madonna did wink her blue eyes and smile a benediction upon him as he knelt at her feet, he was filled with gratitude, and reckoned himself as the recipient of a royal bounty.

It followed, that when, of her own accord, his wife came and nestled down so near him, when she let his hand rest in hers, that Philip's heart grew light. With almost a movement of shame he recalled the ugly fears that had oppressed him earlier in the day. His doubt of his wife's generosity and tenderness seemed to him little short of a crime. He fancied that she had divined that he stood in need of comfort; and with womanly tact and modesty had taken this graceful way of offering him her sympathy. Colonel Enderby was tempted to throw himself unreservedly upon her mercy, to trust her utterly, and unburden himself of his haunting secret. The demand might awaken a deeper life in her; change her from an enchanting child to a noble woman.

At last, filled with a recognition of her sweetness, with a chivalrous desire to humble himself before her, and confess his momentary failure of faith, to tell her all his trouble, the Colonel raised himself on his elbow, and leaned over till he could see her face.

He drew back with a chill sense of disappointment. Jessie's eyes were closed, her breathing was soft and regular.—She was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. SYMES FINDS A CLUE.

It is hardly too much to say that his interview with Colonel Enderby supplied Dr. Symes with an additional interest in life. He was largely given to meditation, and his conversation with the Colonel proved a most fruitful subject of meditation. Dr. Symes was not one of those medical practitioners who, in their devotion to actual bone and muscle, lose sight of the rich social and domestic drama with which their professional duties so constantly bring them in contact. His science was touched with romance; the mental and moral aspects of the phenomena presented to him claimed nearly as much of his attention as the strictly physical ones. In short, he was very far from having reached that condition of high scientific abstraction in which the sensitive, striving, shrinking human being is merged in the mere case; and the delicate opportunity of psychological observation is disregarded in a calm and somewhat cold-blooded desire to add a fact or two more to the records of experimental physiology.

Perhaps the very wide difference between his own temperament and career and that of his new patient made the latter all the more interesting to Mortimer Symes. For the doctor, like so many men of an intricate and speculative habit of mind, was deeply attracted by simplicity and directness of character. To him it always appeared that there were an infinite number of excellent things to be said on both sides of every question; and therefore quick instinct and fearless decision in action impressed him.

His professional career, it is true, had been very successful; his private life, on the other hand, had not been conspicuously so, owing mainly to his inherent tendency to weigh, consider, speculate, concerning the situation, instead of taking his part strongly and promptly. Colonel Enderby's clearness of mental vision, and calm acquiescence in the consequences of his own action, seemed to Dr. Symes extremely admirable. He had protested as vigorously as he dared against the Colonel's decision; yet, from the artistic point of view, he derived real satisfaction from the spectacle of the other man's reckless defiance of pain and probable death. It must here be frankly admitted that Dr. Symes was reckoned somewhat unsound, unorthodox, and even dangerously eccentric, by the majority of his professional brethren. His respect for the free-will of the individual frequently struck them as a reprehensible error. Still, his practice grew and flourished in the

town. And even the county—which is so conspicuously conservative in most matters, and cultivates a righteous horror of frivolous unstable little Tullingworth, regarding it as a Nazareth out of which no good thing is in the very least likely to come—even the county had, in the last few years, given very sensible proof of its faith in this able, if regrettably liberal-minded, medical man. It may be taken as an axiom in every calling, I imagine, that in proportion as you gain the confidence of the lay world, you are liable to lose that of the members of your own profession.

More than a week passed before Dr. Symes saw the Colonel again, and then their meeting was a purely accidental one.

Tullingworth is a clean, pleasant, little town. It is well-built, spacious, cheerful; and has an undeniable air of good society about it. Like various other watering-places that developed their local resources during the early part of the present century, Tullingworth owes much of its successful start in life to that very well-abused gentleman, the Prince Regent. And it has not been ungrateful, inasmuch as it has inscribed his name and the names of some of his well-known associates, on the corner-stones of its broad neat streets and squares of excellent houses. As the Emperor Julian in Paris, so the Prince Regent, here in Tullingworth, would seem to have left a measure of his spirit behind him. The place maintains a calm, well-dressed, and gentleman-like air. It is leisurely. It cannot dig; to beg it is ashamed—unless, at least, the begging can be done with discreet secrecy. It eschews all exertion, save of the lighter and purely voluntarily sort; it amuses itself with elaborate care and praiseworthy diligence. Finally, it might supply an emancipated intelligence with almost unlimited subjects for light comedy pieces.

Perhaps Dr. Symes was afflicted with an over-cavilling habit of mind; but Tullingworth frequently struck him as rather a narrow and inadequate resting-place for immortal souls, on their pilgrimage towards eternity. This thought was vividly present to him one day when he had been visiting a fair patient, who, in the midst of considerable ease and luxury, was a prey to all those miserable ailments that take their rise in chronic *ennui*. He had listened to the lady's recital of her woes with a flattering show of comprehension and sympathy; he had been diplomatic; he had acquitted himself in the delicate office of confessor with tact and success. To quarrel with the vague subjective distresses of dissatisfied womanhood would indeed be, for most popular doctors, to quarrel with their bread and butter! Mortimer Symes had no intention of committing so palpable an error; yet as he came out of the house, and looked up and down the vista of the broad white

street, with its rows of highly respectable porticoed houses, for his carriage, he was conscious of a movement of contempt, both for the megrims of this patient and for his own time-serving in so humouring them. Just then he caught sight of the Enderbys' phaeton, standing on the other side of the way.

Philip himself was driving. The horses were fresh, and were disposed to give a good deal of trouble. Fretted by the frosty chill of the afternoon air, they fidgeted away from the side of the road; backed at impossible angles; and refused to stand for more than a few seconds together. A man is seldom seen to greater advantage, perhaps, than when he is successfully managing a pair of restive horses.

As Dr. Symes glanced at the Colonel he could not help nodding his head with a feeling of satisfaction.

"There, at all events," he said to himself, "is a person who is not addicted to sentimental vapourings; who has a plentiful measure both of moral and physical courage."

Dr. Symes hesitated. He wished greatly to speak to Colonel Enderby, yet, under the circumstances, he was tenacious of seeming to put himself forward.

"I must just manage to have one look at him," he thought. "He is taking a great deal of exertion; I should like to see how he bears it. It is utterly suicidal—unless I made an absolutely inconceivable mistake."

So thinking, he crossed the street, with his short limping gait; and took up a position on the pavement close beside the phaeton.

"Good day, Dr. Symes," said the Colonel, briefly, looking down from his exalted height. "You must excuse my shaking hands with you, these horses are a bit troublesome. My wife's in there, calling on Mrs. Colvin, and she's been rather long over her visit."

Here one of the horses began to back and plunge with unpleasant violence.

"Sorry to leave you," he added, "but I must just let them have a turn, I see."

He gave the horses their heads; and they started off at a rattling rate up the smooth street.

Dr. Symes had made the best use of his time, and noted several little things. Philip Enderby had aged sensibly since he had seen him a week ago. His face was paler and sharper. A hardening of the lines of the mouth; a contraction of the eyebrows; and a rigidity in the set of the jaw were clearly discernible to the doctor's practised eye.

"He is suffering," he thought—"suffering considerably. His

conduct is incomprehensible; it is absurd, unjustifiable. It ought to be put a stop to."

And yet how to put a stop to it Mortimer Symes did not see. Colonel Enderby, he perceived, was not an altogether easy person to deal with; his very singleness of motive made him unapproachable.

"It is intolerable that a man should sacrifice his life in this way," the doctor said to himself. He felt angry; still he was sensible of an undercurrent of admiration for this display of undauntable pluck. It possessed, in any case, the merit of originality.

"There must be something behind which I am ignorant of; some underlying and very potent cause, which I am not in a position to lay my finger on at present. Yes, it is decidedly interesting."

Just then the door of the house immediately behind him was flung open, and the peculiarly clear detached accents of a woman's voice attracted his attention. Mortimer Symes turned towards the speaker. He was sensible of receiving a very distinct impression. A slender, fashionably dressed young woman came with a light firm step out of the house and down the steps. Dr. Symes caught sight of a delicate profile, clustering, ruddy, gold hair, sparkling eyes, lips parted in a brilliant smile over white, even, little teeth;—in short, he beheld an unusually pretty person.

Jessie Enderby was looking back, and talking with considerable vivacity to the young man who came with her out of the house.

"*Et voilà tout!*—Ah, but where are my husband and the carriage?" she said, as she stepped down on to the pavement.

"If Colonel Enderby has got so tired of waiting that he's driven away for good, I shall not be very much inclined to quarrel with him," remarked the young man, half shyly, half audaciously.

His hands were clasped behind him, and he was bending towards his companion with an expression of the liveliest admiration in his pleasant, beardless young face.

"You do not know Colonel Enderby very well," responded Jessie. "His talents do not lie in the direction of desertion, I am happy to say."

The young man coloured. He was aware of having been betrayed into an indiscretion, and of meeting with an unexpected rebuke.

Dr. Symes, hat in hand, came forward, across the grey flags, with his most urbane and courtly manner.

"May I venture to recall myself to your remembrance, Mrs.

Enderby?" he said. "I have just parted with your husband, he will return immediately. The horses had become rather unmanageable; I could not resist standing here and watching Colonel Enderby. His driving is masterly."

The doctor's long, queer, shaven countenance and grizzled imperial—above all, perhaps, his slight infirmity in walking—were not calculated to prejudice Jessie Enderby in his favour. Fortunately, however, the young lady was at that moment in an excellent humour, prepared to be serenely gracious to all comers—even if they limped.

"Ah, thank you," she said; and then added brightly, "I remember you very well. We met at an afternoon party of Mrs. Latimer's. You were not there, Mr. Colvin?"

As she spoke, Jessie glanced at the young man, who, having recovered from his temporary embarrassment, and nodded a greeting to Dr. Symes, had taken his stand with his back to the street, opposite to Mrs. Enderby, and where he could command a full view of her attractive person.

"No, I wasn't there," he assented.

"I do not pity you. It was, between ourselves, a tedious, a really desolating entertainment, was it not, Dr. Symes? Fifteen people were introduced to me. They all asked the same questions—quite a little catechism."

"This becomes extremely agitating," said Mortimer Symes, with unction. "I trust, Mrs. Enderby, I was not numbered among that reprehensible fifteen?"

"No, no, assuredly not. You were the sixteenth; you were the refreshing exception. That is partly why I remember you so well."

"I am greatly relieved," said the doctor.

"But look here, Mrs. Enderby, what were the questions?" asked the young man, keeping his eyes fixed on Jessie's face. It gave him great pleasure to watch her while she talked, somehow.

Jessie shrugged her shoulders the least bit in the world.

"Oh, they were simply *banal* those questions. They had not even the merit of being extraordinarily stupid. All my fifteen acquaintances said they believed we had lately settled at Broomsborough. I acquiesced. They hoped I liked it. I hastened to assure them I always liked everything when it was fresh. They suggested—some, that is to say, the more profound ones—that Midlandshire is an object for unwavering devotion; it is very valuable; freshness has nothing to do with it. I replied, I should be able to judge better of that later on. They asked me if I rode—alas! no. They observed that a move was 'an awful nuisance,

don't you know?' Need I go on?" she added, glancing up at her companions. "The recital of these inanities does not strike me as very amusing, after all."

"The amusement lies not so much in the subject-matter as in the manner of its presentment," said Dr. Symes, blandly.

It must be owned the doctor dearly loved a phrase.

Jessie smiled, and, looking down, proceeded to arrange the bow of ribbon on her muff with one hand.

"When I came to the last of those people," she continued, "I am afraid I did not behave quite nicely. It was a stout old lady; her head was decorated with white lace and insects in metal; she was not very distinguished-looking; the sort of old lady, in fact, you feel does not much matter. I saw she was about to commence the catechism. I was a little impatient; I stopped her. 'Pray,' I said, 'do not give yourself the unnecessary trouble of asking. I know the questions by heart. I do not stand on ceremony. I will tell you everything.' I did tell her," continued the girl, with an air of childlike innocence. "I fancy she is still under the impression I am slightly insane. I heard her say something afterwards about the strange behaviour of half-foreigners.—Ah! there is the carriage, though, at last."

As she finished speaking, Colonel Enderby drew up by the curbstone. There was a singular effect of abstraction in his bearing—of tension, as though he was consciously expending a good deal of energy, and as though his fortitude was heavily taxed. Yet his face brightened and softened as he looked at his wife.

"I am very sorry to have kept you waiting about here in the cold all this time," he said; "but the horses wouldn't stand."

"It was not of any consequence. These gentlemen have been kind; they have entertained me very pleasantly."

"Mrs. Enderby does herself an injustice," said the doctor. "She has supplied the entertainment; the kindness is exclusively on her side."

Young Mr. Colvin came a few steps forward, with his hands still behind him, and addressed the Colonel.

"I hope you're all right again. I did go out to inquire, you know; but your servant seemed to know nothing about it, and Mrs. Enderby was engaged. I've felt most horribly uncomfortable whenever I've thought of that fall of yours. It was the nearest thing in the world."

Dr. Symes did not wait to hear either the end of the young gentleman's speech or Philip's curt rejoinder. A kindly instinct made him turn to Jessie, with his most ornate manner.

"My dear Mrs. Enderby," he said, "will you allow me one of

the privileges that belong to age, and permit me to ask you a favour? I have known the Manor House for years, and have always considered it as a rare little spot. I have regretted that its various owners failed to show an intimate appreciation of the æsthetic possibilities that it offers. I hear on all sides, if you will pardon my saying so, that you have exhibited the most admirable taste and skill in developing those possibilities; that you have grasped the artistic idea of the old house, so to speak, and given the *genius loci* its opportunity; that, in short, you have created a delightful interior."

The doctor bowed.

"Will you give me leave to come and call on you, my dear madam? Will you reintroduce me to the dear old Manor House, now that it has, at last, had the happiness to pass into the hands of a truly appreciative mistress?"

Dr. Symes had an agreeable conviction of having succeeded completely in occupying Jessie Enderby's attention. She smiled very graciously, as she answered—

"By all means come and see me. I am very ignorant; I only know what I like. My house is an attempt merely; but, such as it is, I shall be delighted to show it to you."

"Jessie," said the Colonel, throwing back the rug that covered the vacant seat beside him, "are you ready? The horses will get fidgety again if we keep them standing."

Colvin made a hasty movement, proffering assistance; but the young lady did not accept it. She stepped lightly into the carriage.

"I find I always help myself best," she said, with a little friendly bow, as she settled herself into her place; while her husband, holding the reins in one hand, leaned across and tucked the rug round her. The young man drew back, evidently a trifle disconcerted.

Colonel Enderby nodded to Dr. Symes, turned the phaeton round with a sweeping curve across the street, and then sent the horses on at a rattling pace again.

For a few seconds Mr. Colvin stood, with his hands in his pockets, staring ruefully after the departing carriage. He was a capital young fellow, the pride of his mother's heart—she was a Waterfield, a first cousin of the late Lord Sokeington—and an object of the warmest admiration to his two roundabout, good-tempered, lawn-tennis-playing sisters. He was blessed by nature with a very open and ingenuous countenance, liable to betray freely all emotions working within.

"Upon my word, Enderby's an uncommonly fortunate person!" he exclaimed, with an involuntary sigh.

Dr. Symes turned and looked at the speaker. He had just

arrived at a conclusion; it was a highly disturbing one. He believed he had dug down and discovered the root from which the Colonel's eccentric action sprung. He fancied he had sighted the potent underlying cause.

"Our copy-books used to inform us—at least, in my youthful days they did so—among many other valuable and indisputable facts, Mr. Colvin, that 'appearances are deceitful,'" he remarked, with a dry smile.

Then he moved away in the direction of his brougham, waiting a few doors down the street.

"Drive to Mrs. Farrell's, in Grove Walk," he said to the coachman, as he got into it.

CHAPTER V.

ROMANCE AT A DISADVANTAGE.

LAMENTATION, mourning, and woe reigned in the house of Farrell. Master Johnnie, that precious and somewhat precocious hope of the establishment, was afflicted with a feverish cold. The poor child had really been seriously ill. Cecilia prayed, watched, agonized. Mrs. Murray did something more immediately practical: she packed up her boxes. The worthy old lady behaved on this occasion with her customary forethought and discrimination.

"In case of illness," she said, with a pocket-handkerchief crumpled in her hand, ready for action—"in case of illness, you know, Cecilia, I have always said the same thing. Let there be as few unnecessary people in the house as possible. They give trouble. It can't be avoided. They add to the servant's work; they increase the confusion. I needn't tell you, I hope, Cecilia"—here the pocket-handkerchief came into play—"how dreadfully painful it is to me to leave you and our darling little Johnnie at this moment. But I don't consider myself; I put my own feelings aside; I am ready to sacrifice myself to the comfort of your establishment. No, no, my love; don't dissuade me. I see the right course; let me follow it, let me follow it.—I have telegraphed to Emily to tell her to expect me to-morrow, for a week or fortnight. Poor dear girl! it's so long since I have seen her. Sometimes, Cecilia, I own I fear that, in my love for you, I am tempted to neglect my other children a little."

All this, no doubt, was, on the face of it, extremely becoming and considerate. Flourish, excellent old woman, like a green bay tree; your manners and customs are deeply instructive!

Emily Murray, it may be mentioned in passing, had married, some years previously, a young clergyman of unimpeachable morals, and strong evangelical proclivities. This good man did not, unfortunately, regard his wife's aged mother with any overflowing sense of veneration. He had even gone so far, on one occasion, as to remonstrate with her on what he was pleased to describe as "a sad want of the visible workings of grace in her heart;" and to remark, in the presence of his eldest girl—a surprisingly sharp child of about eight years old, who promptly reported the said remark to her loving granny—that Mrs. Murray's conversation savoured somewhat strongly of that wicked city, ancient Babylon, "which the Divine Mercy saw fit eventually," he added, "as we all know, to visit with great plagues and eternal reprobation—the just reward of its profane and worldly doings." This, not perhaps unnaturally, had caused a coolness between the mother and son-in-law. But Mrs. Murray was a person of experience. She knew that there is a time to pardon as well as a time to take offence. And it appeared to her that, if your appreciation of the things of this life is still pretty vigorous, the moment for forgiveness has certainly arrived, when the exercise of that beautiful virtue will enable you to escape decently from a house tainted with fever—which may, of course, be catching;—and remove yourself to a purer and more salubrious atmosphere. Mrs. Murray, therefore, proceeded to forgive her son-in-law. She buried the hatchet, and after, metaphorically speaking, packing her boxes with plentiful sprigs of peaceful olive, along with her best gowns, took her departure.

Dr. Symes was aware of her mother's absence from home when he so hastily made up his mind to call on Mrs. Farrell. For Cecilia the doctor had a great respect. He believed her to be an eminently unselfish, conscientious, and high-minded woman. Circumstances, he thought, had been woefully against her. Under happier conditions her nature might have blossomed with a refined and gentle sweetness. Even for Mrs. Murray he had a certain regard. Not that he was in the least inclined to include her in the same category as her daughter. It was the frank self-seeking, and plausible hypocrisy of the elder lady that made her interesting in his eyes. In every relation of life, Mrs. Murray appeared to him radically objectionable; but, from the scientific point of view, the doctor was conscious that he enjoyed her—she offered such a rich field for research and observation. At the same time, had she not been safely out of the way, adorning the respectable hearth of her evangelical son-in-law, Dr. Symes would have thought twice before going to the small house in Grove Walk on his present errand.

Cecilia Farrell, on her side, took a good deal of silent comfort in the friendship of her medical adviser. He had more than once been the means of saving her boy's life; and Cecilia's gratitude, though dumb, was very deep. Then, too, he treated her with constant kindliness and consideration; he understood a half-word —and that to a woman in a trying situation is often the very greatest of helps. On the day in question, when she came down into the little square sitting-room to receive her guest, Mrs. Farrell's careworn, anxious face assumed quite a cheerful expression, and her impassive voice took an unusual brightness of tone.

"It is so kind of you to come so soon again," she said, giving the doctor her thin hand, with its prominent knuckles and long fingers; "but it really wasn't necessary. Johnnie is really getting on now; and I ought not to take up too much of your time. I know what a number of other people want you. I'm afraid this room is very cold," she added, looking round in a helpless sort of way. "I have been upstairs with Johnnie, and they have let the fire down. Will you like to come up at once and see him? There is a good fire in the nursery."

Dr. Symes was very sensible of the chilliness of the room—a meagre unsuggestive apartment, with a bleak white-and-gold wall-paper, and cool, shiny chintz covers to the furniture; but he valiantly dominated his sense of impending discomfort.

"My dear madam," he replied, "at the risk of incurring your severe displeasure, I must admit that Master Johnnie's health was not my primary object in coming here to-day. I think we may dismiss any further anxiety from our minds on his account. Last time I saw him, I perceived that he was, thanks chiefly to your unremitting attention, in a very fair way to make a rapid convalescence. To-day my visit is exclusively to you, Mrs. Farrell. I wish to have a brief confidential conversation with you, if you will kindly spare me a few minutes."

The harassed expression came back into Cecilia's face again. Poor thing! she was always on the look-out for the cropping up of possible discomforts. She received her plentiful share of worries in the same patient and submissive spirit that the ordinary donkey receives its share of pokes and blows. The donkey does not rebel, it is true; but it develops a very excusable tendency to wince nervously whenever any person pauses near it with a stick in his hand. Cecilia had an instinctive perception that a stick, in this case, was handy somehow. She sat down with an air of resigned expectation.

Mortimer Symes selected the highest chair he could discover, and established himself sideways on it, leaning one elbow on the

back of it, and resting his other hand on the head of his walking-stick. The doctor's little arrangements frequently possessed a disturbing effect of preparation for very serious business. And indeed, notwithstanding the quickness of his sympathy and genuine kindness of his heart, there was a superficial foolishness about the man; an inherent affection for posing; for fine words and redundant phrases; a tendency to mount the high horse at times, —greatly to the disordering of his hearers' understanding,—and, giving rein to that somewhat annoying quadruped, permit it to career away with him over "antres vast and deserts idle" in the most surprising and Mazeppa-like fashion. He possessed two very different styles of address; which may be respectively described as a wholesale and retail manner. Just now, having been a good deal exercised by various little incidents during the course of the afternoon, the wholesale manner was in the ascendant. Flowers of rhetoric threatened to blossom with amazing luxuriance in the thin, colourless atmosphere of Cecilia's chintz-covered sitting-room.

"My dear Mrs. Farrell," he began, "I find myself between the horns of a dilemma—the exact nature of that dilemma I will presently unfold. My daily occupation, as you know, is to give advice to others; at the present moment I stand very positively in need of advice myself. In difficulty and doubt our sex instinctively seeks the sympathy of yours. You know the lines," added Dr. Symes, with a wave of his disengaged hand—

> "'Oh! woman, in our hours of ease,
> Uncertain, coy, and hard to please;
> When pain and anguish wring the brow,
> A ministering angel thou!'"

Mrs. Farrell felt bewildered. She liked Dr. Symes very much; she would have been sincerely glad to be of service to him: but she was not poetical. She found it impossible to view herself in the light of a ministering or any other kind of angel.

"I am very sorry," she said vaguely.

The doctor, however, was well astride of his steed. He heeded not comments: he galloped forward.

"I may compare myself, Mrs. Farrell, to one standing on the bank of a swift and turgid river. In the water below me I see, so to speak, a daring swimmer, attempting to breast the current. I ask myself, Can he succeed? Knowledge, accurate knowledge, of the unfavourable conditions under which he has ventured on this hazardous undertaking, compels me to reply that he cannot succeed; that his strength will fail, and those ravening waters will infallibly engulf him. I am in a position to render him assistance;

but that assistance is unhesitatingly rejected. I pause. I consider. I cannot save the man against his will; and yet, my dear Mrs. Farrell, my nature revolts against the cold-blooded inhumanity of leaving him to his fate. If circumstances render my offers of help unacceptable, I must search elsewhere for suitable aid. In this painful situation, a beam of light appears to shine upon the dark night of my difficulty; my thoughts turn instinctively towards you."

Cecilia's critical faculty was not highly developed. She was impressed by her guest's generous flow of metaphor. She was also alarmed as to what could possibly be about to follow on so considerable a preface. She murmured something civil in the way of recognition both of the gravity of the matter in hand and of the compliment to herself implied in the final clauses of the discourse.

Then, as frequently happened—a proceeding which his auditors invariably found vastly disconcerting—Dr. Symes suddenly dismounted, discarded the wholesale, and adopted the retail manner. Having, to put it vulgarly, blown off his conversational steam, he became a reasonable being again.

"I am about to commit an indiscretion, my dear lady," he said: "but, in this case, I believe the end may very well justify the means; then, too, I have the fullest confidence in your wisdom.—I believe Colonel Enderby's wife is a connection of yours?"

The colour leaped up into Cecilia's careworn face. The stick seemed likely to come down upon a remarkably tender spot. She became painfully conscious both of looking and feeling very awkward. She was glad the light in the room happened to be dim and uncertain.

"No," she answered hesitatingly; "Mrs. Enderby is not a connection of mine exactly. Her step-mother's—Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay—second cousin, Bertie Ames, is a first cousin of mine; but——" Mrs. Farrell paused.

"Step-mother, first cousin, second cousin!" repeated Dr. Symes. "The relationship is a little intricate, a little difficult to grasp on the spot. Still," he continued, "in any case, you are very well acquainted with Mrs. Enderby; you knew her before her marriage?"

"Oh yes; I have known her ever since she was quite a little girl."

The doctor shifted his position, cleared his throat, and then spoke gravely.

"There is trouble before Mrs. Enderby—serious, very serious trouble, as matters now stand. But as yet the trouble is not

irremediable, if she has a capacity for skilful action and sincere devotion."

The daylight was nearly gone. The gas-lamps in the street outside threw a pale, yellowish reflection of the two windows on to the opposite wall of the room, and revealed Mrs. Farrell's face and figure with distinctness. Dr. Symes looked at her attentively, hoping to gather some information from her expression. He felt curiously drawn towards Colonel Enderby; he would have been immensely relieved to hear that his brilliant young wife was devoted to him. But Cecilia's countenance told of little beyond deepening anxiety.

"What is it?" she asked hurriedly—"what is it?"

"It is this, Mrs. Farrell," the doctor answered. "Colonel Enderby is running great risk of killing himself—perhaps suddenly; perhaps slowly, painfully—by inches, as you may say—and I suspect he is doing it for his wife's sake."

Cecilia Farrell remained perfectly still for a minute or two.

Then she murmured, in a low, unsteady way, "How dreadful! But what do you mean? I don't understand it."

Mortimer Symes changed his position again; this time rather irritably.

"I confess I do not wholly understand it myself," he said. "The facts are simple enough. Painful sensations, consequent, he supposed, on a fall out hunting, induced him to consult me. On examination, I discovered the unmistakable indications of heart-disease. I told him that complete rest and careful watching for a time were indispensable. He swept my advice aside with a wave of the hand. He insists on entirely ignoring his physical condition. I saw him to-day driving a pair of spirited horses; he was looking ill, and it was evident to me that he was suffering."

Dr. Symes paused.

"Colonel Enderby inspires me with remarkable regard and respect. To return to our metaphor, Mrs. Farrell, I cannot stand by till the swimmer throws up his arms and sinks down for ever under the cold waters of death, without making one more effort to rescue him."

Cecilia's lips were very dry; she could barely articulate.

"Dreadful!" she said again, under her breath.

"I am bound by a promise not to mention this matter to Mrs. Enderby—nor, indeed, to any one else," he continued. "I have, in truth, compromised myself by relating the case to you. But my conscience exculpates me; I believe I am justified by the end in view. Mrs. Farrell, I think you are one of those women—Providence mercifully sends us a few in every generation

—who are born to be their brothers' and sisters' keepers. Mrs. Enderby is very young; and most young persons are selfish. It is excusable, in my opinion. The vividness of their own sensations, their lively appreciation of the pleasures of this world, leaves but little space for careful thought of others. Their own cup is full; and one cannot, I think, ask them always to be peering into their neighbour's cup to see if by chance it is empty. Mrs. Enderby is very young, I say. She is alone here; away, as I understand, from all her relations—her natural counsellors, as we may call them. A few judicious words from an old friend like yourself might prove an inestimable blessing to her at this moment; might go far to arrest the uplifted sword of destiny."

The wholesale manner had come on again slightly.

"My dear lady, will you undertake this mission? Will you approach Mrs. Enderby? hint at the real state of affairs? make an appeal to her affection? open her eyes?—do what you can, in fact, to save Colonel Enderby's life?"

Mrs. Farrell rose and roamed about the room in a confused aimless sort of way. The doctor sat watching her closely. He believed in her; and it would, he felt, shake his faith fatally in the self-sacrificing instincts of womanhood if she failed him. He tried to strengthen his cause.

"I have thrown myself unreservedly upon your mercy," he said. "I am sure you will take my word for it that the situation is one of appalling gravity."

Presently Mrs. Farrell came back and sat down again. She had no ready powers of expression. Her sensitive soul was imprisoned in a torpid, unresponsive body. Emotion with her took the form of a dull, numbing, yet penetrating ache, which could find no relief in appropriate action.

"I would gladly do anything, if I could," she said; "but I dare not—I dare not, Dr. Symes. I am quite the last person who can interfere."

"Ah! but," he answered quickly, "there comes a point when it is a duty to lay aside diffidence and superfluous modesty; when, in the name of our common humanity, it is a simple duty to interfere."

"It isn't that," said Cecilia. "I would do it willingly enough if it was anybody else; but I can't, Dr. Symes—for Colonel Enderby."

The doctor was both annoyed and puzzled. For a moment he lost his usual urbanity of demeanour, and spoke without exactly considering whether in his zeal for the Colonel he was not oblivious of what was due to his hostess.

"And why not for Colonel Enderby, my dear madam?" he demanded.

Cecilia Farrell had not been wrong in dreading the stick. It had descended in quite a series of sharp blows during the past quarter of an hour. Under this last and heaviest of them the poor thing absolutely staggered. She put her thin hands over her face, and doubled herself almost together. It must be owned that in this posture Cecilia's figure was not seen to advantage. She had a very long back; and a long back is a disastrous thing in a woman.

"We were lovers years ago," she said at last, very simply. "Men tell their wives about these things generally, you know, after they marry; and laugh over them. I have never laughed over it," she added presently, with a quaver in her voice: "and so I couldn't go and talk to Jessie Enderby. She might misunderstand my motives."

Dr. Symes was silent. Mrs. Farrell's confession seemed to him abundantly pathetic. He was shocked, too, to think what exquisite torture he must have been putting this unfortunate woman to, all unwittingly. He tried to arrange his ideas so as to frame an apology which should be at once soothing and respectful. But Cecilia spoke again before his preparations were completed.

"I hope you won't despise me, Dr. Symes," she said.

"Despise you? Good heavens! my dear madam," cried the doctor, heartily, "I honour, I reverence you. I cannot forgive myself for having caused you pain."

That evening, while Dr. Symes was sitting in his well-furnished library, trying to forget the disturbing incidents of the day in an interesting monograph by a distinguished French scientist, on "Some obscure functions of the Cerebro-spinal Nervous System," a note was brought to him, addressed in Cecilia Farrell's narrow pointed handwriting. This was the substance of it:—

"I have thought over what you told me this afternoon. I am afraid I acted hastily, and only considered myself. I am afraid I shall not be of much use, but I will do what I can."

Dr. Symes contemplated the note silently for a little space of time. Then folding it up, he threw it into a drawer of his writing-table.

"That is a really good woman," he said half aloud. Then he settled himself back comfortably to peruse the elucidation of the obscurities of the cerebro-spinal nervous system again.

CHAPTER VI.

"FOR AULD LANG SYNE."

IT is rather dangerous to make a diffident, slow-natured person the present of a new idea. The idea, finding itself pretty well alone in the mind of such a person, begins to expand, to permeate, till at length it becomes almost unfortunately dominant.

Cecilia Farrell's existence was a cramped and monotonous one. The stock of ideas upon which she maintained it was very limited. It can be briefly inventoried in two words—Duty and Johnnie. To Cecilia's honour, be it repeated that Duty did hold the first place, and Johnnie came second. Dr. Symes had introduced a third idea into her mind; and, after a sharp struggle, she accepted it, because it appeared to her nearly allied to her primary idea of duty. But once having accepted it, it began to assume many fresh and inspiring aspects; the process of expansion and permeation took place; briefly, the new idea possessed her.

After she had put her boy to bed that night, and despatched her recantation to the doctor, Mrs. Farrell found herself by no means inclined for sleep. She had got something to think about. She went upstairs and sat down by Johnnie's iron crib in her bedroom. The fire sent a broad glow upon the ceiling. The house was very still. There was a noise of bells in the air, ringing down at the parish church some half-mile away across the river. This was one of the practising nights of the Advent season; and the sound of the peal came fitfully on the wind, now loud, clear, hopeful, running joyously down the scale; then turning and ringing change upon change in an intricate pattern of sound; and then again dying away, becoming soft, uncertain, distant—sad, ghostly bells, ringing the dirge of days and dreams and aspirations long dead.

Cecilia laid her hand upon the counterpane of Johnnie's bed, and leant her head back against the wall behind her. The bells affected her strangely. They carried her back in thought to the picturesque old cathedral city where she had first met Philip Enderby; and all the unfinished romance of her girlhood unfolded itself before her. She passed again pleasant, sunny, summer afternoons on the broad river, that slips away seaward below the gardens and pretty dwelling-houses of the suburbs of the town; and, further inland, stretches in long, quiet, brimming reaches under the shadow of steep woods and between flat rich meadows,

where the cattle feed or stand staring with stupid curiosity at the passing boats from among the flags and blue geraniums and willow-weed upon the low red banks. She paced again the quaint, winding, paved walks on the city walls, and felt once more that quickening of the pulse and happy rush of half-trouble, half-expectation, with which of old, at some turn of the narrow tortuous way, she had suddenly come face to face with her lover. She remembered every incident of the dance given by the officers of the garrison, as a parting token of gratitude to the rank and fashion of the town and neighbourhood, for the kindness shown them during their stay. She recalled, too, her interview with Philip Enderby two days later in the sitting-room of Mrs. Murray's house, with its tall windows looking over the city walls and the wide green circle of the racecourse below, to the sharp curve of the river, round a high wooded promontory, under the hard lines of the red-brick viaduct, and across miles of rolling country to the faint blue-grey ranges of the Welsh hills rising against the western sky. Cecilia remembered the little presents he had given her; and the long, somewhat untidy letters he had scribbled her during those two years of patient waiting;—remembered, too, how the arrival of one of these same untidy epistles spread a glory over all the following day.

But there, upon my word you and I have had nearly enough of this, sensible reader—haven't we? I own I feel like some ghoul or other unholy creature when I begin turning over a woman's little graveyard of love-memories in this way. They are such delicate, ephemeral, absurd little things, that one is afraid of touching them with clumsy, masculine fingers. They are dead and buried, I know, long since: and yet, as one reads their simple epitaphs, and perhaps inserts an inquiring, speculative finger under the crumbling boards of their coffin-lids, one has a sense that what lies within quivers and shrinks away in modest horror and anguish from the profanity of one's investigations. Let us leave them to rest in peace, then, and come back to the robust and burly present.

When Mrs. Farrell met Colonel Enderby again, there could be no doubt at all that he was very much occupied with another woman. The whole of the Terzia episode had been deeply humiliating and distressing to her; not that she bore the Colonel any grudge. Her own marriage, she held, had entirely cancelled any vow of allegiance he might formerly have made her; too, the idea of engaging in a competition with Jessie Pierce-Dawnay was manifestly ridiculous.—Cecilia admitted herself to be plain, middle-aged, uninteresting, with rather pathetic openness.

But now the scene had changed apparently. Sorrow, pain, possibly death, were ahead. She was not in the habit of looking on the bright side of things, and had accepted the darkest interpretation of Dr. Symes' statement. Her mind projected itself with intensity upon the situation, and she saw that, along with this gloomy prospect, came her own opportunity. She might now be of use; and to be of use—too often in a sadly blind and blundering manner—was the deepest necessity of Cecilia's nature. She sincerely believed she was responding to a call of duty. Alas! Cecilia, look a little further into the question. Those meetings and partings, those hand-pressings and kisses of long ago, take this affair somehow outside the strict limits of cold duty, I fancy.

But meanwhile the poor thing had a moment of strong exultation, as she sat stiffly on her hard chair by her boy's bedside. She would go and see Jessie; plead and reason with her; implore her to acknowledge the truth—painful as it was—and meet it bravely and lovingly. Never mind, if at first the young girl should be angry with her, and intimate in her neat, clear-cut, smiling way, that she, Mrs. Farrell, had been guilty of an impertinence. Just now Cecilia felt herself strong, daring, not to be baulked by anything. To set things right, and then to retire into silence and obscurity, seemed to her a rather splendid way of terminating her relation with her old lover.

The bells clashed together once or twice loud and clear. Then there was silence. Little Johnnie Farrell woke with a smothered cry, and sat up in his small white nightshirt, his face flushed with sleep and his eyes staring wide open.

"Mother, mother, are you there?" he called. "I've had a horrid dream."

Cecilia put her arms quickly round the little trembling figure.

"Yes, dearest, I am here," she answered.

Master Johnnie recovered himself with great promptitude.

"That's all right," he said. "I was most awfully frightened."

Cecilia laid her thin, worn cheek against the little lad's soft, round one, and pressed him nearer to her; but the child drew back his head.

"I say, mother, you're all wet and messy, you know," he remarked, with an air of considerable disgust. "I believe you've been crying."

She had not known it before; but now that Johnnie called her attention to the fact, Cecilia became aware that she had been crying a good deal.

"I say, mother, you must stop off that; I don't like it," continued the boy, in a tone of high authority.

Then, as his mother wiped her eyes furtively, he added, with the sublime egotism of childhood :—"And, too, there's nothing to cry for now that I'm getting better."

Cecilia's heart smote her.

"No, no, darling," she said; "there's nothing—nothing at all to cry for."

Master Johnnie, having exercised the hereditary right of the superior sex and admonished his womankind, curled himself comfortably down in bed again. His mother watched him for a time; and when at last the boy's quiet breathing announced that he had found his way back safely into the mysterious kingdom of dreams, she knelt down on the floor by the bedside and buried her face in her hands.

For Cecilia had begun to suspect herself, to question the purity of her motives. Her thoughts had been vain, self-indulgent, unbecoming; she had been proud, rebellious, self-seeking. In common with most genuinely humble-minded and devout persons, Mrs. Farrell's sense of sin was profound. Really, by the way, that same sense of sin is a very singular phenomenon; for in proportion as sin itself is absent, the sense of it seems to flourish in the human heart. Cecilia's life for years had been one long act of self-abnegation, and yet she felt herself to be very low down in the scale of Christian virtue; her faults seemed numberless and ever-recurring, her alienation from the Eternal Goodness overwhelmingly great. While Mrs. Murray, on the other hand, whose progress through this world had not, to put it mildly, been exactly that of a prominent and conspicuous saint, was by no means afflicted with any such consciousness of her own shortcomings; but trundled along towards eternity in a very fearless and light-hearted manner.

Mrs. Farrell remained a long while on her knees,—praying both for herself and for brilliant Jessie Enderby. She prayed for Philip too. It does not very much matter what she said. Mrs. Farrell was not a talented or eloquent person; and her prayers were probably confused and imperfect utterances, not in the least fitted either to adorn the pages of a religious biography or to be printed in some elegantly bound volume of private devotions. Still, such as they were, they brought her strength and consolation; and may, therefore, be reckoned as proving personally and subjectively fruitful, at all events.

Next day the idea was still dominant; but it had suffered a change. It had passed a night within the grim precincts of a puritan conscience; and issued forth in the morning no longer clothed in the delicate garments of romance and tender memory,

but wearing the sober, ascetic habit of unadulterated duty. Cecilia had reduced herself to order; and prepared to go forth on her difficult mission to young Mrs. Enderby in the same sternly mortified spirit in which she bore the many and grievous burdens laid upon her by her affectionate mother, or administered nauseous medicine to the weeping and recalcitrant Johnnie.

She had decided to go over to the Manor House without delay. She therefore started the following day, directly after an early dinner though the weather was bleak and misty, and the roads were greasy with mud.

Cecilia had an unlucky habit of perceiving things just too late. She was full of a solemn conviction and a strenuous purpose; and it quite failed to occur to her that an ill-shaped over-garment, boots unsightly with mud, and the general demoralization of the personal appearance consequent on a long wet walk, might injuriously affect her influence with Jessie Enderby. The children of light, with their pure, straightforward intentions, are very far, too often, from being wise in these trivial matters; and the nobility of their motives does not, unfortunately, prevent their finding themselves at a corresponding disadvantage.

Mrs. Farrell— a tall, hurrying form, clad in that most lamentable of all feminine garments, a round waterproof cloak—took her way by back streets to a quarter of Tullingworth that lies across the river, along the low ground, between the canal and a range of dreary brickfields. This region presents a marked contrast to the rest of the smart, pleasure-loving little town. It is a moral Alsatia, to which, by the law of social gravitation, all the human refuse of the place finds its melancholy way. Mean, one-storied houses open on to narrow, black wharfs and ugly cinder-paths, where bargemen and labourers loiter at dreary corners, and ragged shrill-voiced children angle for sluggish minnows in the slimy water, while the smoke and stench of the burning bricks fill the thick air. Dirty little shops maintain a feeble existence, with an attenuated show of attractions behind the panes of their dim windows. Only the public-house rises prosperous, cheerful, defiant above the dingy squalor of unpaved streets and lanes. Such places are altogether too common on the outskirts of even flourishing, well-to-do places like Tullingworth, for it to be incumbent on one to make much fuss over them: suffice it to say that they, perhaps, wear their most forlorn and forbidding aspect on a drizzling winter's afternoon.

It was characteristic of Cecilia that when asked to assist in parish work, she should accept the care of this uninviting district, which had proved altogether too hard a morsel for the other fair

devotees of Tullingworth. Mrs. Murray had spoken her mind upon the question; and prophesied that Cecilia would get little besides fevers, fleas, and ingratitude as the reward of her labours. Of the latter she did, in point of fact, get a fair share. Her anxious looks, her cold, yet hesitating manner, were not calculated to render her popular. Only Dr. Symes, indeed, in his most florid of moments, could have hinted at her relation to anything in the ministering angel line. During Johnnie's illness Mrs. Farrell had, not without sharp twinges of conscience, somewhat neglected her unpromising district. This afternoon, which she had determined in any case to devote to the service of others, seemed a fitting opportunity for the paying of some visits already overdue.

Revolving in her mind how she should open her conversation with Jessie, Cecilia went hastily along one of the unsavoury lanes, without any careful picking of her way among the cabbage-stalks, rubbish, and grating cinders that composed the roadway; and stopped at the last house—a miserable red-brick structure, abutting on the unwholesome-looking, excoriated stretch of the brick-fields. A slatternly woman stood in the doorway of the cottage, nursing a baby of some eight or ten months old; and two undersized children, with thin pinched faces, played about on the damp mud floor just within.

"You've come down at last, then, Mrs. Farrell," said the woman. "I thought you'd got tired and forgotten about us, like the rest."

"My boy has been very ill," replied Cecilia, humbly. "I could not leave him."

"It's no use asking you to come inside," said the woman, pointing over her shoulder at the bare room behind her, while she slowly rocked the fretting baby in her arms. "The bit o' furniture went the day before yesterday."

"Went?" inquired Mrs. Farrell; "went where?"

"Went for rent. Nice place to pay rent for, too, isn't it? They left us a mattress in the back room, for me and the children to lay on o' nights, and that's all. They're pretty well pined, poor things, wi' the hunger and cold. The men took the blankets along wi' the rest, and there's nothing to cover 'em; so they might as well 'a had the mattress too, as far as I see."

Cecilia fumbled in her dress pocket for her purse.

"I am very sorry," she said.

"Oh, it ain't much use your being sorry," answered the other, shortly.

Then, suddenly, the poor creature sank down on the worn grimy doorsill, and burst into tears.

"Before the Lord, I've done my best. But everything's been agin me, what wi' illness, and slack work, and one thing and another. I've come down, and down, and down. I said I wouldn't give in, and I ain't; but it's going a bit too far now. Sometimes I think the canal there 'ud be the best place for all of us. It's best to be dead—be dead, and out of it; there's no room for poor folks like us here in this world."

Cecilia Farrell was deeply pained and agitated; she tried to speak, but the woman interrupted her fiercely.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say. There's the Union. I know there's the Union, as well as you do. Haven't I fought up against it these months past; though I knew from the night my poor master was brought home stiff and dead, last January, it 'ud got to come to that at last? Don't you be afraid," she went on, looking up with a gleam of bitter humour, as the two children, frightened by her tears, pressed up against her, crying, "Mammy, mammy:" —"Don't you be afraid; I shan't do them any harm. Maybe I love 'em just as well as you do that boy of yours you couldn't leave to come and help us a bit. They're very patient, poor things, but they can't hold on much longer. They'll begin to cry for bread soon; and it'll go through me, and I shall give in, and take 'em to the House."

Cecilia held out her hand; she had emptied the contents of her purse into it.

"There, take it; it's all I have got with me. Feed the children, in any case."

The woman snatched at the money, looked at it, counted it, and then laughed.

"You're not one of the wise ones," she said. "The wise ones give us precious little but words we don't want. This 'll keep us out a few days longer, and any one can see the poor things here 'ud be a deal better in the House. You ain't wise, but I like you none the worse for that."

"Perhaps we can arrange something for you," Mrs. Farrell said. "I'll do what I can. I don't forget things. I'll come back again to-morrow or next day."

"You're going now, then? Well, I don't wonder. It ain't very pleasant hereabouts. A lady like you soon has enough of it."

"I have to go to another house where there is trouble," said Mrs. Farrell, sadly, as she turned away.

"You needn't go further than next door for that, then," the woman called after her. "There's a sight of trouble both sides of this lane here, 'most all the year through."

Life seemed to Cecilia Farrell a terribly dark and mysterious

business, and her own share in it sadly touched with incapacity and failure, as she walked through the dirty streets by the canal again, and, passing to the left behind the evil-smelling gas-works, turned into the broad well-kept high-road, with fields on either hand, and neatly clipped hawthorn hedges, that leads from the outskirts of Tullingworth to Broomsborough.—Alsatia has the decency not to obtrude itself upon the sight of comfortable, well-to-do humanity; it hides its ugly head in unfrequented corners. You need know nothing about it unless you want to, be it remembered.

The drizzling mist had deepened into unmistakable rain. Cecilia put up her umbrella, and bent forward as she walked along the road; while her cloak flew out in a great balloon behind, then, collapsing, it flapped in the rising wind, giving her long, lean figure the strangest and most ungraceful appearance.

CHAPTER VII.

A TEA-PARTY WITH INTERLUDES.

"It will be just too perfectly lovely. You will be a public benefactor, Mrs. John Enderby.—That is the right thing to say, isn't it, Mr. Drake? I feel rather awkward about calling you Mrs. John Enderby; it sounds familiar. I hope you don't mind what I say sounding familiar? But you will be a public benefactor. You will give us animation. My husband, Ashley Waterfield, says the society of this county is the most perfect thing in the world. Then I think the most perfect thing in the world is wanting in animation. Don't you think the society here wants animation, now, Mrs. Enderby? You are like me, you come in from the outside; we have not the advantage of being natives. My husband says it's a great advantage to be a native. I ask him, if it's such a great advantage to be a native, why he did not marry a native, instead of marrying me? And, Colonel Enderby, you didn't marry a native, either. I think there must be advantages in not being a native, too. I am sure there are advantages in animation. Well, now, Colonel Enderby, your wife is what I call very animated. Don't you think it's an advantage, any way?"

The speaker, Mrs. Ashley Waterfield, occupied a chair in Jessie Enderby's drawing-room. It may be added that she occupied it very fully; not that she was a large or overflowing person. Both in face and figure she was not only uneccentric, but decidedly pleasing. She had a way, however, on all occasions, of appearing

to present herself voluntarily for public inspection; and of being so pre-eminently aware of her own presence, that others became almost, to themselves, irritatingly aware of it too.

Mrs. Waterfield sat perfectly still in her chair, with her remarkably small hands in a pretty pose on her lap, and poured forth her stream of statement with extraordinary rapidity, turning her head from side to side, and addressing the different members of her audience in turn. Deportment is a lost art in England. On the other side of the Atlantic it appears still to flourish. Mrs. Waterfield had a great deal of deportment—somewhat of the monthly fashion-plate order, perhaps; but it made an impression, nevertheless, upon certain sections of English society.

"The real difficulty is young men," said Mrs. Jack Enderby, as soon as a pause enabled her to thrust in a remark. "Young men are always the bother at a ball in the country."

Mrs. Jack threw back the fronts of her heavy ulster; thereby exhibiting a fine bust, and a waist still possessing claims to neatness, encased in an irreproachably plain well-fitting dress-body of rather loud checks: Augusta Enderby's action was always large. She was, perhaps, somewhat distressingly healthy in appearance. Her steady colour, abundant dark hair, bold, though kindly brown eyes, strong voice, and positive movements, gave one an impression of an almost vulgar immunity from those ills that flesh is heir to. She had a decided prejudice in favour of herself and her own possessions, which prejudice had the happy effect of keeping her in a pretty constant good temper. In short, she was, as her husband so often said of her, "a capital good fellow." It may be noted, in passing, that one's admiration for Mrs. Jack had an inclination to find expression in a class of terms usually reserved for members of the stronger sex.

She had driven herself over to the Manor House to-day, with her head full of an important project. The time of mourning for old Matthew Enderby was well over; and Mrs. Jack had it on her mind to make her public entry into local society, in her new character of mistress of one of the best-known places in South Midlandshire, with nothing less than a really good ball. She had come to discuss this question with her pretty sister-in-law, for whose knowledge of how to do things, and capacity for detail, she possessed a high respect. Then, too, Augusta had a lingering feeling that it was by something of a fluke, after all, that she, instead of the Colonel's fascinating wife, found herself enthroned at Bassett Darcy: and she took, in her large, good-hearted way, such lively satisfaction in her present dignities and possessions, that she, perhaps, somewhat over-estimated Jessie's loss in the matter,

and felt particularly anxious to defer as much as possible to her young kinswoman.

Augusta's observation about the difficulty of obtaining young men, opened the floodgates of Mrs. Waterfield's discourse again very promptly.

"Why," she said, "now, Mrs. John Enderby, there is Ashley to begin with. I know he is married; but you would call him a young man, wouldn't you, though he is married? I call him a young man. He is only four years older than I am, and I am a young woman now, ain't I, Mr. Drake? Of course, if I ask you, you couldn't say I was an old woman; I know that. But I really am a young woman. And then there is Sokeington. I will speak to Sokeington, Mrs. John Enderby. Sokeington is a very good friend of mine; he must have a house full at Pentstock. There are forty-two bedrooms at Pentstock. He could ask a number of young men down. My cousin, Lewis Vandercrup, is coming to England in January. You said in January, didn't you, Mrs. John Enderby? Sokeington could ask him—I mean Lewis Vandercrup—down to Pentstock too."

"Vandercrup, Vandercrup?" murmured Mr. Drake.

The excellent little man was sitting, with his knees very far apart, on a settee just opposite the fire,—which had caught his face, as the saying is, and made it even ruddier than usual.

"Vandercrup? Yes, to be sure; remember him perfectly. Met him at Venice in the spring. People said he was one of your American millionaires, don't you know; had got a fabulous sort of a fortune."

"I don't know about fabulous," responded the lady, in her high thin tones. "Fabulous seems to mean something dreadful; something with two heads. Well, Lewis Vandercrup has not got two heads, any way. He is very nice-looking. Some people say he is rather ordinary; I don't think he is ordinary, unless it is ordinary to be like a gentleman. Lewis Vandercrup is just the most perfect gentleman. Then there is Charlie Colvin. I don't usually call gentlemen by their first names like that. I think it is bad style to do it; bad form, you would say, Mr. Drake.—But Charlie Colvin is a connection of my husband's. I always call my cousins by their first names, and my cousins by marriage too. Well, Mrs. John Enderby, you must ask Charlie Colvin. He is one of Mrs. Enderby's admirers. Eh? Well, I am sure he is a great admirer of yours, Mrs. Enderby."

"Jessie," said the Colonel, getting up from the sofa where he had been sitting, a little way from his wife; "can't I take these teacups for you?"

"Oh yes; give me my tea, Jessie," cried Augusta, cheerily. "I'm as hungry as a hunter after nine miles in the rain."

"Why, have I said anything wrong?" exclaimed Mrs. Waterfield, looking round intelligently upon her companions. "My husband says I run on so. I suppose I do run on. Do you object to your wife having admirers, then, Colonel Enderby? Well, now, I like admirers. I don't see the use of a woman being so elegant, and perfectly lovely every way, as Mrs. Enderby is, if she mayn't have admirers. Why, what an awful Blue Beard of a husband you must be, Colonel Enderby, if you don't like people to look at your wife. If I had a wife, I should want everybody to look at her all day long.—No, I don't take sugar in my tea, thank you. Till I came to England I never took tea at all. My mother never would let me take tea when I was a young girl. She believed it was bad for the digestion. Now, I don't believe it is bad for the digestion, do you, Mrs. Enderby?"

"Young men, young men?" said Mr. Drake, circulating genially meanwhile with the bread and butter. "No difficulty about them, upon my word, I'm sure. Well, now, there am I for one."

Augusta laughed good-humouredly. She and Mr. Drake were old friends; and, having a very genuine kindness for each other at bottom, felt themselves at liberty to indulge in mild personalities at moments.

"Yes, there you are," she said. "But you see, you can't multiply yourself indefinitely; and even if you could, I'm not sure you would satisfy all the aspirations of all my pretty girls, you know."

"Bless me, I'm a very good sort of a creature. Surely you could not have too much of me?"

"Oh no, certainly I couldn't," responded Augusta, laughing again.

Jessie meanwhile pushed about the teacups on the table before her impatiently. She felt slightly irritable. Mrs. Waterfield had monopolized the conversation, and Mr. Drake's pleasantries always bored her. She had got on a wonderful new tea-gown, with a long train to it, and the most delightful trimming of bobs and beads, and loops of ribbon all down the front, and great frills at the bottom of it, which had the effect of making her feet look particularly small—that was a comfort. But she wanted to talk seriously with her sister-in-law about the ball; and she could not get in a word edgeways. She looked up at her husband with a charming little demand for pity and sympathy, shrugged her shoulders, and sighed in a quite pathetic manner.

"Oh, I understand you; don't spare me," Mr. Drake was saying, in answer to some further speech of Mrs. Jack's. "You mean I'm old. I am a good deal more than four years Mrs. Waterfield's senior, anyhow."

"Well, I guess you are, Mr. Drake," observed that lady, sharply.

"I'll tell you what it is, you know. I look in the glass every morning, and say to myself, 'Drake, my good fellow, you're getting on; turn to, and mend your ways.' And yet, upon my soul," he added, sitting down again, nursing one knee, and taking an argumentative tone:—"I don't really feel it. It's a most singular thing, but I don't seem to be able to take it in somehow. I don't feel a day older than I did at twenty. And I tell you what, you know, it's uncommonly interesting, but lots of other men say just the same.—There's Enderby, now, he's a case in point. You're getting on, you know, Enderby, and I'll be bound you feel every bit as young as you did five and twenty years ago, don't you?"

"Why, I'm sure this must be very encouraging for the rest of us," remarked Mrs. Waterfield, parenthetically.

Mr. Drake's speeches were frequently incoherent, and not generally calculated to leave an impression of mature wisdom on the minds of his hearers, who might readily be led by them to credit the statement, that this middle-aged gentleman found himself in very much the same intellectual atmosphere as that which he had breathed during his crude and ingenuous adolescence. Still, there was a practical sagacity about Edmund Drake that, looking on his round untroubled countenance, and listening to his stumbling speech, one might hardly have given him credit for. As he made his not over-wise appeal to Colonel Enderby, he observed that Jessie turned upon her husband a strangely fixed and inquiring gaze. Quite another woman seemed to look out of the girl's fresh young face for the moment,—not a pleasant woman, hard, clever, cold-hearted, worldly. Mr. Drake had a quick misgiving; to himself he repeated certain old opinions he had formed on the subject of his friend's marriage.

Fortunately, however, for once in his life, the Colonel did not happen to be thinking about his wife. He raised his eyes with an air of abstraction, and sat slowly pulling at the ends of his moustache for a second or two, before answering. Then he said—

"Alas! Drake, you've hit on the wrong man this time. I shan't serve you as a happy example. I don't feel the least as I did five and twenty years ago, or five months ago, either, for that matter."

Colonel Enderby's voice had an odd ring in it, which arrested Augusta's attention. She looked rather hard at him.

"Oh, stuff a' nonsense, Philip!" she said in her loud, good-natured way. "I never saw a man wear as well as you do. Poor Jack, now, does begin to show signs, you know. I won't enumerate them—it isn't fair to criticize his weak points behind his back. But you—nonsense!"

"It seems to me we are having a rather graveyard sort of conversation," Mrs. Waterfield said. "I declare what with Mr. Drake here, and Colonel Enderby there, I begin to feel quite blue, that I do. Now, you feel blue too, Mrs. Enderby, don't you? If I was you, I wouldn't let my husband talk in that way. When Ashley says anything like that, I stop him. I tell him he makes me feel real bad. Now, Colonel Enderby, are not you sorry? You have made me feel so badly I shall go home directly. I want you to ring the bell right away, and order my carriage."

Just at this moment Berrington threw the drawing-room door wide open.

"Mrs. Farrell!" he announced, in his half-aggressive manner. And Cecilia, waterproof and all, stood revealed in the doorway.

"Oh my!" cried Mrs. Waterfield, involuntarily.

"Mrs. Farrell! dear me!" Augusta exclaimed, turning round with an air of considerable surprise, and speaking in tones that were perfectly audible.

Philip Enderby rose hastily to his feet—too hastily, in fact, for he had to wait a moment before he could follow his wife across the room to meet the new-comer. He had noted a disagreeable tendency in himself in the last few weeks, which gave him a great deal of annoyance. A small matter would cause him to start and change colour. He had the greatest difficulty in keeping himself in hand, in avoiding speaking sharply and angrily, at times. It seemed to him that all his nerves had got outside his skin, so to speak.

Jessie jumped up with a little cry of pleasure. She swept across the room in her long trailing tea-gown, with the most charming smile of welcome on her pretty face. Why, she hardly knew, but she was immensely glad to see Mrs. Farrell just then.

"This is delightful, Cecilia," she said. "I didn't know you were in England. Have you heard anything of Bertie lately? He has left the red villa, and Mamma is a little mysterious about him."

She put up her face, intending to give Cecilia a kiss in this moment of expansion; and then, drawing back suddenly, held her petticoats carefully away with one hand.

"Ah! you must forgive me, but you are so very wet. Surely you cannot have walked out here in this horrible weather?"

Some people certainly seem born to be the sport of unkind circumstance. Poor Mrs. Farrell, her soul purged of all vanity and self-seeking, had set off on her mission in the most purely evangelical spirit. Her imagination had attached itself with clinging tenacity to this interview with Jessie Enderby. She had rehearsed the scene twenty times over in her own mind: but, unfortunately, Cecilia's mental pictures were painted in neutral tints; they were sadly lacking in detail, in vivacity of action, and in atmosphere. She had had a vision of herself,—a sort of embodied providence,—earnestly exhorting Jessie,—a serious, grey, and anxious phantom,—to consider the solemnity of the present condition of her devoted husband,—who, in his turn, figured as a vague being, sad and shadowy as any ghostly hero greeted by Odysseus, in the dreary kingdom of Hades. When she had told the poor woman down in the cottage by the brick-fields, that she was going on to another house where there was trouble, she had spoken honestly out of a strong and simple conviction. Trouble, in her mind, was the great leveller, merging all differences of class and surroundings; bringing human relations out of the transitory and conventional on to the common ground of our common suffering. Her gloomy walk had increased the exaltation of Cecilia's state of mind. Her vision of the coming interview, though wanting in colour, was by no means wanting in strong reality to her.

And now, suddenly, being ushered into this warm, bright fragrant room; seeing these people with their air of refined well-being and luxury; hearing Mrs. Waterfield's shrill chatter, as she stood arranging herself a little by the fire, and pouring a broadside of concise statement into Mr. Drake and Mrs. Jack Enderby,—Cecilia Farrell suffered a cruel shock and transition of feeling. What went she out for to see?—Pain, sorrow, the dread of coming tragedy. While that which she did, in fact, see seemed to her far more akin to kings' palaces, and the soft raiment usually worn therein. Cecilia felt as though she had fallen from a great height. The whole world turned mean and common around her. She became absorbingly conscious of her own nervousness and agitation, and of the unsightliness of her present costume. She felt how ineffectual, incongruous, almost ridiculous, she must look. She struggled bravely against her humiliation; but it was too strong for her, she sank into a bitter conviction of her own uselessness and incapacity. For, alas! the experience of Saul, the son of Kish, is too often exactly reversed. How many a noble soul starts forth, full of hope, in search of a kingdom: and, instead of

the prophet and the promise and the oil of anointing, finds nothing, after all, but those familiar and irritating old animals—his father's asses! Such episodes may be brief in execution; but they are immensely disconcerting.

"Yes, I walked over," she said humbly, while the fairy palace of her new idea crumbled into ruins within her. "I wanted very much to see you, Jessie; but I had some places to call at on the way."

She looked down with an expression at once distressed and apologetic at her damp skirts and muddy boots.

"I am so sorry," she went on; "I'm afraid I'm very dirty."

"Mrs. Farrell must take off her cloak, and you must get it dried for her," said the Colonel. "If you're kind enough, Mrs. Farrell, to come out and see my wife in such weather, I'm sure the least she can do is to take good care of you when you get here."

Cecilia glanced at the speaker quickly and gratefully. Then she began fumbling at the buttons of her cloak. Unhappy Cecilia! she was desperately nervous; and all her fingers turned into thumbs.

"I believe I must ask you to go and hurry up the carriage, Mr. Drake," Mrs. Waterfield was, meanwhile, saying. "My husband says I always stay too late when I come to see Mrs. Enderby. Well, I dare say I do. I think Mrs. Enderby just one of the sweetest women I know. Don't you think her awfully sweet, now? I don't like using that word awfully; I don't think it's ladylike. I suppose I caught it from my husband. I always have been very quick about catching things. My mother always said I had a wonderfully good ear. It is a great thing to have a good ear, now, isn't it, Mrs. John Enderby?"

And so on, and so on. Philip's nerves were on edge. Between Mrs. Waterfield's chatter on one side, and Mrs. Farrell's unsuccessful struggles with her waterproof on the other, he began to feel the position intolerable. He even went so far as to motion Jessie, rather imperatively, to help her guest off with that odious garment; but the young lady merely put up her eyebrows with a charmingly amused expression, looked eloquently at Cecilia's moist clothes, at her own dainty hands, and then back at her husband again. And Philip was just debating whether he had not better go down on his knees before his love of long ago, and fight hand to hand with those obstinate buttons himself, when Augusta Enderby mercifully came to the rescue.

"Here," she cried in her large, capable manner, "let me do it. Your buttons are a size too big for your button-holes, you

know, Mrs. Farrell. All right, though, I'll manage them. There you are!" she added, as she whipped off the offending over-garment.

And there indeed was Cecilia, with the pure, self-sacrificing soul of a Puritan saint unseen, and with a long lean person, adorned about the shoulders, too, with a not over-fresh red and white woollen cross-over, quite distinctly seen—hitting you in the face, as you may say, with its lamentable want of elegance and distinction.

"Oh my!" murmured Mrs. Waterfield again, under her breath. Then she announced for the twentieth time that she must go; and after an effusive and comprehensive leave-taking, rustled away—still chattering—deportment and all.

A few minutes later Mrs. Jack made a move.

"Well, my dear, come over and see me as soon as you can," she said, as she kissed her pretty sister-in-law. "We'll have a good talk about the ball, and really settle things. The last week in January would be best, I think. The hounds meet at Bassett that week, and there's the Slowby Hospital ball on the Wednesday, so we could work it all in nicely. Mind, I reckon on you, Jessie. You're clever, you know, and I'm not."

"If you're driving yourself, I advise you to go the lower way, through Lowcote Park," observed the Colonel, as he helped Augusta on with her ulster. "The road up by Stoney Cross is in an uncommonly bad state, not fit to take horses over at night."

When Mrs. Jack Enderby, followed by the two gentlemen, had left the room, Cecilia felt the hour of her trial had arrived. Jessie had given her some tea; but she was too agitated to drink it. She sat uncomfortably enough on the settee, nursing her cup, which made a little slip and rattle every now and then from the unsteadiness of her hands.

As to Jessie, her rush of enthusiasm for Mrs. Farrell had speedily evaporated under the influences of the melancholy waterproof. She had found out that Cecilia had been a long while in England, and could give her no fresh news of Bertie Ames. Notwithstanding her delightful tea-gown, the young lady felt, too, that the last hour had not been exactly crowned with success. She was a trifle out of temper; and her irritation took the form of sprightly malice.

She moved across, heaped a couple more logs on to the fire, watched the quick leap of the flame as the flaked edges of the wood touched the glowing bed of coal beneath; and then, turning upon her guest with a brilliant smile, observed—

"You said you wanted very much to see me, Cecilia. Had

you anything special to say, because here is an excellent opportunity? We are alone; I am attentive."

The girl stood in an easy attitude, looking admirably pretty, with her head a trifle on one side, and her eyes fixed on her companion's face.

Prevarication was not Mrs. Farrell's strong point. Everything had gone badly for her, yet she clung with a kind of unfortunate heroism to truth and duty.

"I did want to see you very much, Jessie," she said, looking up in her tired, troubled way, and speaking with hesitation. "I had something I felt I ought to say to you; but it is so difficult to know how best to say it."

A mischievous light came into Jessie's bright eyes. She had something of a child's thoughtless pleasure in teasing and confusing larger, more helpless creatures than herself.

"Begin at the very beginning, dear Cecilia," she answered softly, "and go straight on. No doubt, if I attend very carefully I shall eventually understand, even though I am rather a stupid person."

"I was afraid, from something I had heard, that you might be anxious and distressed, Jessie."

There was an appeal in the elder woman's manner; dumbly she implored the girl not to laugh at her.

"And I fancied you might not quite know what to do, being here without Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, or any old friend to speak to. I thought, perhaps, you would be glad to talk to a woman you knew—somebody whom you had known a long while. It is easier to say things to an old acquaintance. I don't want to put myself forward," she added hastily; "I only wanted you to make use of me, if there was nobody better."

During the above speech a succession of different expressions crossed Jessie Enderby's face. The merriment passed away; for a moment that painful look of unreasonable terror stared out of it. Then the girl seemed to arrive at a firm determination; she became calm, almost smiling again.

Mrs. Farrell was not in a condition to register, much less to interpret, the meaning of these rapid changes. She had set down her tea untasted, and leant forward, full of confused longing and sympathy.

"I do not pretend to understand exactly what you mean, Cecilia," said the girl, looking away into the fire, while she fingered the elaborate trimming on the front of her gown; "though I do not doubt that your intentions are full of kindness. If you have heard any rumours to the effect that I am not happy, they are

false. I am not distressed, I am not at all anxious. Why should I be? My life is generally delightful. Philip is charming to me. We are all a little bored at times, of course; and to be bored is a great evil. But now that Philip has given up hunting I am rarely bored, because I am rarely alone."

"But—but, Jessie," cried Cecilia, speaking urgently—"oh, please don't be angry with me—are you sure you are not deceiving yourself, and overlooking something? It's no business of mine, I know; but you are so young, of course you can't be expected to understand the importance of those little indications. You see, you can't have much experience. Of course I don't blame you for an instant; I only want to save you from regret when it may be too late. You spoke of Colonel Enderby just now. You say he has given up hunting, and people say he is not looking well. Don't you think—— "

But there Mrs. Farrell stopped; the blood rushed into her thin cheeks. For the life of her she could get no further.

Jessie's lips parted, but it was hardly in a smile this time. The two rows of small white teeth were set very firmly together. She drew herself back a little, like some beautiful, lithe, feline thing, crouching ready to spring.

"*Mon Dieu!* Cecilia, you are mysterious," she said. "Fortunately, my nerves are good, or your conversation might appear absolutely alarming."

"Oh, Jessie, Jessie!" cried Mrs. Farrell.

She knelt down on the floor before the girl, and put out her hands in an agony of entreaty.

"Don't be hard with me; don't turn away, don't repulse me. I wouldn't trouble you but that I care so much about your happiness, and—and your husband's. He is ill. Do listen, dear; try to be brave and face it. I would do anything in the world to help you, only—— "

But Jessie interrupted her.

"Go away," she burst out fiercely, "go away, Cecilia Farrell. What right have you to come here and disturb and frighten me with all sorts of rubbishing rumours and gossip? Get up off the floor. I do not want you. Why do you come to me, with that horrible, woollen shawl too, and talk to me, and suggest things, and make me uneasy, and cause me to be violent—which I hate being—and rude and uncourteous, as I am now? I will not know, or hear, or see. I will not know, I tell you. It is all an invention, a wretched lie, to poison my happiness. You are cruel; you are envious. Get away from me."

Meantime, a passage of arms of a very different character had

been taking place between Mrs. Jack Enderby and Edmund Drake in the front hall.

"You can't let her walk back to Tullingworth, you know, in this weather," Augusta had said, laughing. "If there's a grain of proper feeling left in you, you'll drive her home in that celebrated dog-cart."

"Proper! proper's just the wrong word," replied Mr. Drake, fidgeting about prodigiously. "Why, God bless me! think of the talk—dog-cart, dusk, unknown lady, and your humble servant. Impossible, you know; there's an end of my reputation."

"I didn't know you had any left by this time. If you have, of course, that makes a difference."

"Didn't know I'd any left, eh?" Mr. Drake rubbed his hands; he was immensely delighted. "Heard anything particular about me, then, just lately?"

"Oh, something abominable—scandalous. Really, you know, I hardly like to repeat it."

Mrs. Jack tugged at the back seams of her ulster to get it into place, and laughed again good-humouredly.

"Save poor Cecilia Farrell the walk back to Tullingworth, and I'll get over my modesty and tell you."

The Colonel stood at the hall door, looking out into the drizzling murky evening. The lamps of Mrs. Jack Enderby's carriage showed with a blurred, red glare through heavy air, as the coachman walked the horses slowly up and down the carriage sweep. The moisture dripped with a dull sound from the near trees and overhanging woodwork of the gables.

Philip was sad and very tired—worn with strain of suffering and of constant watchfulness; worn with that weary daily struggle to look just as usual, be cheerful, and keep up appearances; worn with fear of his wife's detection; worn with yearning that she might come to him and lay her fair head on his breast, and tell him that she knew all, and still loved him—that, ill or well, it should make no difference. Looking out into the mist and darkness, the strain seemed a little more than he could bear. The thought crossed his mind—how long would it all go on? Should he be able to stand it? But he drove the thought away from him strongly, imperatively, with a movement of pride and self-contempt. The night, it seemed, gave evil counsel. He turned back into the hall again, where Augusta and Drake were still chaffing each other.

"You gave thirty pounds to that tiresome Slowby hospital, over and above your subscription, when their funds were low at Michaelmas," said the lady. "Isn't that enough to make half

the county cut you? Think how mean you've made all the rest of us look! Abominable!"

"Oh! confound it, Mrs. Enderby!" cried the worthy little man, with an air of deep disgust, "that's all, is it? Oh! Now, I tell you what; I'll make a bargain with you. I'll drive Mrs. Farrell home to-night if you'll ask her to your ball in January. It would be a first-rate thing to do. Looks as if she wanted a shaking up, poor thing, somehow."

"Very well, anything you like. I really must go. She'll refuse, though, so I shall have much the best of the bargain. There, stop the carriage, please, Philip; I'm awfully late. And bring Jessie over as soon as you can; we're always delighted to see her. I believe she grows prettier every day. Good-bye, Mr. Drake. Mind you don't back out of your engagement. Yes, all right; I am well tucked up, thanks."

"Now, Enderby," cried Mr. Drake, fussing back into the hall again, when Mrs. Jack was fairly off, "I'm regularly in for it, you see. I've got to make proposals to the widow. Do you think she'd be willing to move soon? I've got a man coming to dinner, so I must trot. Could you go and sound her, do you think?"

When Colonel Enderby went back into the drawing-room, he perceived immediately that something had gone wrong. Jessie came swiftly up to him, and took hold of his arm.

"Did you send her?" she demanded, pointing to Mrs. Farrell, who stood, a limp dejected figure, on the other side of the room. "Did you know she was coming here to terrify me?"

"Jessie, dear child, be quiet," he answered, in a low voice. "I've sent nobody to you. I don't even know what you are talking about."

The tone of Philip's voice and his look, as he bent down over the girl and spoke to her, were just the last straw to Cecilia Farrell. She had done no good; it was all a miserable failure. The very completeness of her defeat, the utter impossibility of explaining and putting herself in the right, gave her the dignity of desperation. She could not trust herself to look again at Philip Enderby, as she moved across towards the door.

"I will go," she said quietly; "I am very much pained at what has occurred. I——"

But the Colonel interrupted her; he was thankful to have something to speak about.

"My friend Drake is just going to drive back to Tullingworth," he said civilly to Mrs. Farrell, and keeping his hand steadily on his wife's shoulder, meanwhile. "He deputed me to ask if you would do him the honour of driving back with him.

It's a wretched night, and will be very dark soon. I don't think you ought to walk."

Cecilia hesitated. She was very unhappy; she would have been glad to be alone; but she did not want to appear unreasonable, or in any way offended.

"It is very kind of Mr. Drake," she replied; and her voice was a little shaky.

"Don't ask me any questions, Philip," said Jessie, when she found herself alone with her husband, some few minutes later. "I don't want to talk about it. It is not true. Let us forget all about it."

She came and nestled up against him, and drew his arm round her waist.

"Do you love me as much as ever, Philip?" she asked.

Colonel Enderby paused for a just appreciable space of time before answering. Then he bowed his head solemnly, as a man who worships.

"Yes, my wife," he said, "I love you just as well as ever."

Jessie was silent for a minute or two. As she moved away she said:—

"I don't much like Mrs. Waterfield; I shall not ask her here again, I think."

Philip's face brightened.

"No, I would just as soon you didn't," he returned. "I don't very much fancy her either, to tell the truth."

BOOK SIXTH.

THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.

CHAPTER I.

FLESH OR SPIRIT?

THE summer and autumn following her step-daughter's wedding were to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay a period of deep and searching experience. She had made a return upon herself; and that return was not made without considerable pain and mortification. She examined herself and took heed to her ways. The examination revealed many facts that were far from flattering to her self-love; the heeding of her ways showed those same ways to be very far from paths of pleasantness and peace. Still in face of the overmastering necessity felt by most persons to stand well with themselves, it was not a little to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's credit that she should so honestly acknowledge her own shortcomings. To be ashamed is to be capable of amendment: and to be capable of amendment is perhaps the highest good to which any one of us can reasonably aspire.

Nevertheless, a sense of shame, though most salutary, no doubt, to the soul, is hardly an agreeable or inspiriting daily companion. Eleanor was troubled in many different directions. She had come to realize, with morbid intensity, her responsibility toward Philip Enderby. She exaggerated her own share in his marriage,—ignoring the fact that he, after all, was quite as ready to make his proposal as she was to have him make it. She looked with feverish anxiety for the English post; and managed to read between the lines, to a rather superfluous extent, whenever she received a letter either from Jessie or the Colonel. The former hardly possessed the pen of a ready writer. Her communications were brief, concise, dealing largely in fact and sparingly in emotion. Jessie wrote gaily enough; but her step-mother required more than mere gaiety. She demanded, as usual, assurances and assertions:

they did not seem to her to come. Colonel Enderby, when he referred to his wife, did so in terms altogether worthy of a true and ardent lover; yet, somehow, Eleanor was not wholly satisfied. On the other hand, let it be granted that hers was a nature very prone to believe in the purifying efficacy of self-torture.

Mr. Ames wrote too. His letters arrived with a regularity and exactitude too careful quite to please the recipient of them. They were amusing and affectionate letters; but they were wanting in what may be called the note of intimacy. They were the letters of a man who is sensible of an obligation, and who strives to fulfil it in the very best manner: women have lynx eyes for these subtleties.

Bertie was travelling in the East, in company with two agreeable young French gentlemen of his acquaintance. They were making researches. He wrote quite learnedly, yet not without refreshing touches of his habitual cynicism—of ruined temples, stupendous tombs, of deserts, and camels, and Arab sheiks, and the last iniquity of his dragoman. His route was uncertain, he said; it was difficult to say exactly when or where letters would find him. Sometimes his cousin tore up these sparkling epistles in a passion of impatience; sometimes she came very near shedding tears over them. Poor creature! one way and another she was certainly a good deal tried just now. Her life seemed to her wretchedly purposeless, barren, and sterile.

Miss Keat had returned. But both that lady's gentle tentative watchfulness and Parker's grim tenderness harassed Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay sadly. A household composed exclusively of women is always liable to take a turn in the eccentric and hysterical direction. Notwithstanding their true regard for one another, all three women grew—it must be owned—uncommonly touchy; each one of the trio being prepared to affirm that she alone was keeping her head, while the others were exhibiting unmistakable signs of incipient insanity.

About the end of August, Miss Keat, however, came involuntarily but effectively to the rescue. Eleanor had stoutly refused to go away. At moments she hated the red villa; yet she had a morbid dread of leaving it and venturing into the outer world again. The summer was hot; the dust and glare from the high-road and the sea almost blinding. As one cloudless day followed another, poor little Miss Keat began to give out. She missed Jessie's joyous presence; she missed the gentle excitement, necessarily produced in an innocent and virginal heart, by the daily sight of a good-looking young man with that most attractive of all attributes—a history. Miss Keat began to melt both mentally

and physically. Her round, little figure fell away till the fronts of her mild grey cotton and alpaca dresses became quite loose and baggy; her pale blue eyes grew daily more vague and watery. Between heat, and worry, and depression she was on the verge of a serious breakdown. Suddenly Eleanor discovered all this; called herself a monster of selfishness and ingratitude: and before her companion had time to draw a breath or utter a feeble protest against giving everybody so much trouble, the Villa Mortelli was left, with locked doors and closed shutters, in the care of the peasant overseer, and she herself was being petted back into good spirits and plumpness among the cool breezes and deep green valleys of Savoy.

Winter saw the household re-established in its old quarters. And to her old troubles—which, by the way, assailed her pretty shrewdly when she resumed her solitary mode of existence—Eleanor had contrived to add a new one, or, to speak more accurately, to revive a past one, which, first the society of her republican friends, and then Mr. Ames' advent, had put to flight some years previously. She plunged into religious polemics; once more she became anxious about the welfare of her soul.

But this time—thanks to the conversations of a cultivated and agreeable Catholic priest, whom she happened to meet during her sojourn in the mountains—her aspirations no longer turned in the direction of ultra-Protestantism; but in that of the Roman Communion. The gentleman in question—himself an Oratorian—talked to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with admirable tact, charming adaptability, and with that underlying suggestion of immutable personal conviction which is so captivating to an enthusiastic woman. Catholicism is not seen in a very refined or spiritual form in Italy. England, unquestionably, in the present day, has the privilege of producing the most exquisite flower of that profoundly agitating and alluring system.

Eleanor was unhappy; she was in need of advice; she yearned—as she had frequently done before—after a distinct vocation. A light seemed to break upon her clouded spirit. She confessed to this stranger things which she would have found it impossible to tell her oldest friend. Perhaps she has never quite forgotten the words which closed her last interview with him, out on the short-cropped turf of the mountain-side, with the solemnity of the everlasting hills brooding above her and the murmur of the streams in her ears.

"The Church," he said, "has infinite consolations. You have only to claim them. The doors of her holy places stand ever open; her hands are ever outstretched, in blessing, to draw souls

to her. She alone has dared to fulfil the whole of the divine injunction, adding the wisdom of the serpent to the mildness of the dove. She alone has had the glorious audacity to look at human nature as it really is; not turning away her eyes from what is vile, and foul, and shameful in it, either in outraged pride or profitless despair. She can dare to probe every wound and search deep into the secret places of man's sin-corrupted heart, because she knows that a miraculous power of healing is with her still, and that she has hope even for the most degraded and fallen.—Some persons venture to smile at the Church as archaic, as the perverse preserver of outworn superstitions. In truth, she, of all religious systems, is the only living and progressive one. While keeping firm hold on the wisdom and beauty of the Past, she is willing to use the wisdom and beauty of the Present. She treats the diseases of the soul as modern science treats those of the body; she is always experimenting, acquiring new facts, recognizing fresh manifestations of eternal law.—Come to her, and she will give you Rest—the only rest possible amid the intricate desires, the anarchic and conflicting passions of modern life. She offers you the serene repose of faith and of obedience; she saves you from yourself; she gives you a rule of life consecrated by the acceptance of saints and martyrs; she gives you a Law as well as a Gospel. Believe me, there can be no peace, here or hereafter, for those who will not accept the first as well as the last of those two things."

It followed that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay went back to the little red villa with the inspiring sense of a great possibility hanging over her. She was deeply stirred. How much the charm of her new teacher's voice and manner,—his delightful withdrawal from the world, and lively knowledge of it—went for in her growing convictions, I cannot pretend to pronounce. Bearing in mind the tendencies of the lady's nature, and the present unsatisfied state of her affections, I cannot but imagine that they certainly went for a good deal.

Here I feel that some idealist—always supposing that an idealist should condescend to peruse these humble pages—may cry out rather angrily,—is there no influence, then, which one human being exercises over another, that is wholly pure, unalloyed by any question of sex, above all reproach of the material sensuous element? That question is a painful and risky one to answer. Yet I am afraid the present writer must honestly confess that for his part he has never yet had the happiness of witnessing the operation of such an influence. He hastens to add—in self-defence—that if at any future time he should do so, it will give him the very highest satisfaction to chronicle it.

Eleanor anyhow, took her spiritual perturbations quite seriously. She spent the early winter months tossed on a sea of doubt and indecision. It was not wholly disagreeable to her, perhaps; for this condition of mental agitation made her extremely interesting to herself: and as long as one is interesting to one's self life cannot be said to be unendurable.

The real victim of the situation was Miss Keat. She was constantly required to read aloud lives of the saints, histories of the Church, and treatises sundry and manifold of a ferociously dogmatic and doctrinal order. The good little woman, being herself a staunch Anglican of what may be described as the *Monthly Packet* school, was lamentably put about by this outbreak of controversy on the part of her patroness. She had a tenderness for the early British Church *versus* Augustine; and had been wont to speak, with commendable asperity, of the unwarrantable pretensions of the Bishop of Rome. Now all the foundations of her position seemed in danger of being rent asunder. The poor dear British Church daily threatened to assume a wholly vague, mythical character, while Augustine appeared painfully likely to get it all his own way, after all: and Miss Keat caught herself, more than once, in the act of substituting the subversive expression His Holiness for her former contemptuous and comfortably insular appellation.

By the end of December, Eleanor was in a state of mind in which one shove from a strong hand would have settled the matter for good and all. She was constant in her attendance at the large, gaudily decorated church down at Terzia; she read and meditated regularly; she talked and thought of little besides this one subject —and undeniably it is a subject on which there is a vast amount to be thought and said.

Miss Keat mourned alone up in her large, bare bed-chamber over the endangered existence of moderate Anglicanism and the Church of her fathers. Parker grew daily more grey and angular. Personally she failed to see what anybody was likely to gain by an exchange of religious systems.

"It's all very well to call yourself something different," she said; "but, there, don't tell me—you ain't a bit different really. It's just the same as a woman changing her name in marriage—she fancies she's going to slip out of all her old plagues; but she finds out she is the same woman, after all, though I'll be bound she wishes she wasn't, often enough. Now, I never held very much with Mr. Ames," she added, "but I can't say but what I should be glad to see him if he came back just now."

Miss Keat, to whom the above observations were addressed,

gave no direct answer. Her moist, blue eyes were firmly fixed upon a large grease spot which sadly disfigured the front of her grey alpaca.

Parker sniffed. There was a fluidity, so to speak, about Miss Keat which made her appear a very feeble and trivial affair at times to the strong-minded waiting-woman.

By the beginning of the new year Eleanor believed she had arrived at an irrevocable decision. She wrote a long and expansive letter to her acquaintance of the summer, whose arguments and sympathy had so deeply affected her. Nor did Eleanor contemplate taking half-measures. The magical attraction of the strictly religious life dazzled her imagination. She longed, by one definite act, to cut short both her difficulties of faith and of the affections. She rehearsed to herself her parting letters to Bertie Ames and to the Enderbys. To Bertie it would be a tremendous slap in the face, which she took a bitter pride in the thought of administering. Colonel Enderby, she felt, would probably remonstrate, and be extremely angry. Englishmen of his type were usually woefully prejudiced in such matters. But she believed, with all the turbulent ardour of her generous nature, that at length she had found rest unto her soul. She smiled at opposition, and was disposed to wave the martyr's palm—before she had gained it too—in a slightly aggressive manner.

She made an official announcement of her plans, one particularly cold and dreary morning, to Parker. Eleanor scorned evasion. She informed her faithful servant that she had arranged to go shortly to England; and put herself in direct communication with the Superior of a Religious House there, with a view to becoming eventually a member of the community.

"I've been expecting something of this sort for a long time," Parker replied, with rather irritating stoicism. "Of course you can do as you like, ma'am; there's nobody I know of to prevent you."

She then returned quietly to the examination of the pile of clean house-linen she carried over her arm.

"I was going to ask you to get some new sets of chamber towels," she added; "these are wearing very thin in places. But, of course, if you're going out of housekeeping they won't be wanted."

This innocent remark had somewhat the effect of a sudden dash of cold water in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's face.

"You don't take it seriously, Parker," she cried. "You don't really believe in it."

"Well, there's some things you do believe in more after they've happened."

Parker gave the linen a shake to make it lie flat on her arm. Eleanor felt extremely angry. She gathered the rich, heavy, fur-trimmed cloak she was wearing—the passages and stair-ways of the little, red villa were dreadfully cold—close about her handsome bust and shoulders, and swept stormily away downstairs.

In consequence, perhaps, of the unedifying episode above recounted, Miss Keat was kept particularly hard at work on the lives of the saints and Church history during the following afternoon. It was an odious day. One of those days, in fact, in which beautiful, smiling Italy gives way to the vilest temper, and becomes a perfect virago. The harsh wind rushed round the corners of the house, rattling the wooden shutters backwards and forwards between the plastered wall and their iron fastenings, and whistling in every crevice of the ill-fitting woodwork. Sharp showers of snow and sleet fell at intervals, blotting out the town below, and the long line of surge on the beach; and leaving, when they had passed, a starved and dreary world shuddering beneath a hard grey sky.

Eleanor, with her books and papers, her companion, and her smouldering fire of resentment against Parker—who had refused to "take her seriously"—was sitting in the small drawing-room in which she had had her memorable conversation with Colonel Enderby the day after his arrival in the spring. The aspect of the room was depressing. The spindle-legged white-and-gold chairs, the high bare walls, the pale frescoed ceiling, and the sun-blanched window curtains—swaying in the draughts that made their way in freely at the hinges and catches of the large casements—produced a sufficiently cheerless and even poverty-stricken interior. Those miserable, little Italian billets of wood, pile them together as you may upon the hearth, seem powerless to dispel the deathly chill that lingers about these vaulted chambers and marble floors from November till April.

Eleanor drew her soft fur cloak closer about her and shivered. She was bound to disregard temporal comforts, to cultivate a severe ascetic habit of mind; meanwhile she disliked this bleak weather quite tremendously, and had a frivolous disposition to grumble aloud over the draughts and the moaning wind.

"*Ce Séquanus, dont nous racontions plus haut le tranquille courage*," read Miss Keat, carefully minding both her pronunciation and her commas, "*et la fervente piété, avait été prévenu*——"

"Forgive my interrupting you," said Eleanor; "but don't you think if the screen was pulled a little more this way—no, like that I mean, to the right—we should be warmer? There is a simply polar blast coming in at that window. Yes, thanks; that really

is better. And Séquanus, don't trouble to go back, pray. I remember about his piety and courage."

Miss Keat sat down again by the small table loaded with serious-looking volumes. Her gentle and modest spirit, and her dependent position, made these same saintly lives very attractive to her. The calm, delicate, yet austere pages of Montalembert were more sympathetic to Miss Keat than she was quite willing to allow.

"Oh yes," she went on: "*avait été prévenu que les abords de l'impénétrable forêt où il allait s'aventurer étaient occupés par des bandes d'assassins——*"

"Surely there is some one at the front door!" exclaimed Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

Notwithstanding her magnificent projects and finely religious moods and fancies, this lady was at bottom, like all true women, essentially concrete and personal. The early saint, with his courage and bands of assassins, was undoubtedly deeply important. She had a perfectly sincere belief that his life had a subtle and profound, if slightly obscure, bearing upon her own spiritual needs and history. And yet, alas for human weakness! somebody at the front door was certainly more immediately interesting. She had the grace, however, to make an attempt at concealing an open acknowledgment of this pitiful fact both from herself and Miss Keat, and added—

"Surely no one in their senses would dream of coming here to-day! It really would be most annoying. When we are settled down at work like this, I hate being interrupted."

"*——des bandes d'assassins, que l'on qualifiait même d'anthropophages. 'N'importe,' avait il répondu à celui de ces proches qui——*"

"There is some one coming upstairs," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She let the needlework she held in her hands slip on to the ground at her side. Her mouth was slightly open; she sat bolt upright, listening intently.

"It is probably Marie going to fasten the drawing-room shutters," Miss Keat observed, in a tone of mild reproach. Then she went on reading again: "*celui de ces proches qui se croyait le propriétaire de cette région, et qui lui donnait ces renseignements, 'montre-moi seulement le chemin pour y arriver——'*"

"Miss Keat, you must stop; pray stop!" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She had turned very pale. She stood up. Her handsome dark eyes had a wild, eager light in them, and the fur-lined cloak

she still wore fell back from her shoulders in a royal sort of fashion.

Good little Miss Keat looked up in innocent bewilderment, troubled with uncomfortable visions of the possible arrival in bodily form of the afore-mentioned anthropophagi on the landing without.

As the door opened, Eleanor gave a low, exulting laugh.

"Yes, I knew it—I knew it," she said under her breath. Then her expression grew tense and defiant again.

Whatever strictures we may be tempted to make upon his conduct in some matters, it is quite undeniable that Mr. Bertie Ames possessed a fund of the most admirable composure. He dawdled into the small drawing-room of the Villa Mortelli, after some nine months' absence in far distant lands, on that bitter blowing January day, with the air of a man who has, at most, been away for half an hour.

"Ah!" he murmured, in his rich sweet tones; "you really contrive to be moderately warm in here. What a mercy! The weather outside is a scandal. It is an absolute outrage."

"You have come back," said Eleanor, hoarsely.

She did not offer to go forward and greet him, but stood quite still in the same rigid attitude.

"Yes, I believe so," he replied, smiling at her mildly. "Surely it is a very reasonable thing to do? It is quite a long time, when one comes to think of it, since I have had the pleasure of seeing you, dear cousin Nell, and Miss Keat."

Bertie Ames bowed pleasantly to the latter lady as he finished his speech. Miss Keat bridled perceptibly.

"Oh, Mr. Ames!" she said.

"I was going to ask you to indulge me," he continued, "to do me a favour, a quite prodigious favour, Miss Keat. I am here—like this—in the clothes I stand up in. Would you see Antonio for me, and arrange about his going down as soon as possible, and getting my luggage, which is cooling itself at Terzia railway station? It would be a real act of charity on your part, Miss Keat—a laying up of imperishable treasure against the future."

"Oh, Mr. Ames!" said that lady again, slightly shocked.

Eleanor sat down again in the corner of the sofa, within the screen. Great gusts of wind rushed round the house, and banged and rattled the shutters, while the sleet hissed against the glass of the windows. But the storm which raged in the beautiful woman's spirit was of even fiercer quality. She adored this man; and yet she almost loathed him, as he stood quietly warming his hands at the fire. He was so infuriatingly calm and suave, so delicately

indifferent in manner. Already she was sensible of the tremendous power he exercised over her.

There were a few minutes of silence after Miss Keat left the room, then Eleanor spoke.

"Why have you come back, Bertie?" she demanded.

"I am afraid I startled you, Eleanor," he said, looking round at her, and still stretching his brown, well-shaped hands towards the fire. "It was stupid of me—but—well—I was, honestly, in a hurry—in a hurry to see you."

"Charming!" she replied, with an effort. "The statement actually seems to have a faint aroma of compliment about it."

Bertie Ames came across from the fireplace and sat down at the other end of the wide sofa. Eleanor pushed her full skirts aside instinctively. She was on the defensive. She wanted to maintain the farthest possible limit of distance between herself and her companion.

"Dear cousin Nell," he said, looking at her with a certain steadiness of gaze, "do not try to be unfriendly or ungracious. Let us be natural. I have come here neither out of impertinence nor frivolity—just to pass the time. I want to consult you. Really, for once in my life, I have got something which appears to me important to say."

Bertie paused. Notwithstanding the directness of his gaze, there was a trace of hesitancy in his manner; but Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay made no effort to help him out. All her energies were concentrated upon the one desire to withstand his influence.

"Eleanor," he went on, "have you heard anything particular about the Enderbys lately?"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay tossed back her head impatiently.

"Happy are the people who have no history!" she said, almost contemptuously. "There is nothing particular to hear; it is the old story. Jessie amuses herself, and Colonel Enderby adores her."

"That is nothing new, certainly," he answered. "But does she adore Colonel Enderby in return?"

"Do you wish her to?" inquired Eleanor. "I congratulate you. Decidedly your recent travels have had a highly beneficial effect upon your mind."

Mr. Ames smiled blandly.

"All things are possible, Nell. And though change of scene is so universally advocated for the cure of mental depression that one naturally has but small faith in it, it may really be efficacious now and again.—But, seriously, to return to the matter in hand. I received a most singular letter from Cecilia Farrell the other day, forwarded by my banker in Milan. Cecilia's epistolatory style is

slightly confusing; it is vague in matters of punctuation, it wants lucidity, it does not exactly possess what one would call literary merit. Still, I made out something from it; quite enough to be disturbing. She hints at dark mysteries and dire secrets regarding the Colonel. Don't be alarmed; not moral lapses of any kind. He remains the original good boy, I assure you. But I really am afraid his goodness is a trifle excessive, just now, and treads hard on the heels of folly. As far as I can discover, the position is really an uncomfortable one. He is dangerously ill, and won't tell Jessie or take any care of himself for fear——"

Bertie looked away, and raised his eyebrows.

"Well, we both know Jessie," he added quietly. "Jessie is a great many delightful things; but she is not exactly the woman one would choose to be nursed by."

Eleanor listened with deepening interest. She began to forget herself, while all her old vague fears rose again for Philip Enderby. She threw the fur cloak back off her shoulders, and looked her companion frankly and earnestly in the face, as she said—

"Colonel Enderby did me a great kindness. He has behaved very nobly by me. If this is true, I must interfere. I must try to help him; I must do something."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! but there is just the difficulty. Colonel Enderby is as proud as Lucifer; your good people are always the impossible ones to manage. Cecilia only knows all this through an indiscretion on the part of his doctor. The doctor and Cecilia, it may be noted in passing, seem on wonderfully friendly terms.—We all know, let alone Cecilia's personal charms, how irresistibly impelled any man would be to covet my aunt Mrs. Murray in the capacity of a mother-in-law. Well, Cecilia seems to have done her best to intervene for the Colonel's sake—poor dear Cecilia! But her intervention was a little—— How can I put it gracefully? It proved abortive, any way. Now she writes to me; she says I have influence with Jessie, she implores me to use it. It struck me as a little awkward, Cousin Nell, and I came here to consult you."

Eleanor sat upright and silent. The finer and the baser instincts of her nature wrestled together, turbulently.

"We must think it over carefully," said Mr. Ames.

"Yes," she responded coldly, "we must think it over."

Bertie Ames rose, walked away to Miss Keat's little table, and turned over the books that lay on it, reading their titles in a pointless sort of way. For once he seemed embarrassed and not quite certain how best to conduct himself.

"Is that ugly little abomination Malvolio all right?" he asked presently.

"I believe so," answered Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

Since Jessie's wedding day the monkey had been anything but a favourite with her; and she had banished him sternly to the lower regions of the red villa.

"You propose remaining here to-night, I suppose?" she added, after a pause.

The situation was not an easy one to sustain. It weighed heavily upon her. She felt she could hardly stay in the room with her cousin without the conversation going farther; and it could hardly fail, in going farther, to become dangerous. She gathered up her work, that had lain neglected on the floor for the last quarter of an hour, got up, and prepared to leave the room.

"I must go and speak to Parker about preparing your room," she said.

Bertie Ames dropped the heavy book he was examining on to the table; it slipped and fell to the ground with a bang. He did not stop to pick it up; but came quickly across to her.

"Wait one minute, please, Eleanor," he said. "I have only half done my story."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay sank back on to the sofa again, and looked up at the young man, with his handsome face and neat pointed beard, as he stood before her. Exactly what it was in his appearance that revealed the fact to her she would have been quite unable to say, but Eleanor had a rapid perception that some extraordinary change had come over him.

"What is it, Bertie?" she cried, in sudden agitation; "what is it? For God's sake, tell me."

"The Countess Tolomei is dead," he answered.

Then Bertie Ames' long-sustained composure gave way utterly and entirely. The wild, hot-blooded, southern nature burst out and overflowed in him. He flung himself down on the sofa.

"I am free," he cried, "I am free. The chain is broken at last. I belong to myself. I am my own master. It has been damnable! Like a madman I loved her years ago; like a madman, nay, like a very devil, I have rebelled and hated, and cried out and agonized after freedom. And now it is all over. The past is wiped out. It has come, this thing I so wildly implored to have, and—silly fool that I am—I shrink before it. It is so new and strange. I am fairly frightened."

He covered his face with his hands, threw himself forward till his head rested right down on his cousin's knees, and broke into an absolute passion of weeping.

As to Eleanor, she was shaken to the very foundations of her being. There was a fascination, a delight, in the position that was terrible, blinding. Her whole heart melted in fierce joy. Yet she struggled generously not to give way, not to take advantage of the man's overmastering emotion, though each of his sobs as he lay there sent a thrill of delicious anguish right through her. Eleanor sat up tall and still, with the folds of her thick cloak falling about her. She laid one fine white hand on the varnished, gilded woodwork of the back of the sofa; and let the other hang down idly at her side. With not so much as a finger would she touch him. She would be quite quiet and passive. Come what might, Bertie should never have to regret that he had so lost himself, and so trusted her.

But a woman is too heavily handicapped. The body gives way, even while the will is yet steady and active. The young man's passion did not soon wear itself out, and the strain of it was too great for Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. Her sight became blurred and dim, a sickening languor crept over her; and when Bertie, recovering himself at last, looked up with a keen sense of shame and self-recollection, she lay back, pale and lifeless, against the great, faded sofa-cushions, in a dead faint.

Mr. Ames was a first-rate nurse, as has already been mentioned. He chafed his cousin's hands, found her salts and eau-de-Cologne —and, all the while, he was in a turmoil of thought, of doubt and perception, and of fateful decision. This woman loved him. In person she was very attractive; he was sincerely attached to her. There was nothing very fresh about it all, perhaps; but, then, we can't have everything, and Bertie Ames at four and thirty was a bit of a philosopher. It is not a thing to be lightly treated after all, the passionate love of a beautiful and noble-hearted woman, who knows the worst as well as the best of you. Eleanor was past her first youth; but, then, so was Bertie himself, for that matter. He was undeniably conscious of a sharp pang when he thought of Jessie. Oh that this had only occurred a year sooner! Yet Bertie—looking down at the white face of the woman before him, as she slowly opened her luminous eyes, and came back once more to the normal and familiar out of that strange interval of unconsciousness—had the grace to know that, in receiving the acknowledgment of her affection, he was receiving very much more than, in strict justice, was by any means his due.

"Cousin Nell," he said, sitting down by her again, and taking her hand, "is it possible that you care for me a little?"

Eleanor was very weak; she recognized, too, the absolute futility of any further attempt at concealment. The expression of

her delicately shaped mouth was sad, but it was wholly sweet as she answered him.

"That question has been a long time in coming, Bertie?"

"Yes, Nell," he said. "But you were always very generous."

"To my shame, I have answered the question before you asked it."

Bertie Ames raised her hand and kissed it, looking at her very fixedly as he did so.

At the touch of his lips the colour rushed back into Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's face.

"Ah! stop, stop," she cried, with a sudden desperate energy; "stop before it is too late. You will regret this; you will wish it undone. Cancel it now at once. Tell me you don't mean it; that it is all a crazy dream and delusion. You have been forced into it hurriedly, without due consideration, through my folly. Take it back while you can. I will forgive you; I will drive it out of my mind. I will never, never refer to it or reproach you. But if you go further, Bertie—oh, I am so weak!—I shall not be able to bear it; it will break my heart."

For all answer Bertie Ames bent forward and kissed her on the lips.

"It was fore-ordained, Eleanor; it is done and settled. Pray don't say so many charming things to me; you will make me intolerably conceited. And it would be an obvious mistake on your part to increase the number of my offensive peculiarities, just as you have made up your mind to pass the remainder of your natural life in my company."

Later that same evening, when she had read Cecilia Farrell's letter, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned in thought very warmly towards the Colonel. Did she not, after all, practically owe him everything? She had got what she had longed so ardently for at last; and the satisfaction of her longing, far from making her selfish, exalted her moral nature for the time, and produced in her a craving after conduct that seemed to her heroic and splendid.

"You must go to England, Bertie," she said. "Yes, I will dare to trust you. Indeed, I should feel safer if you see Jessie again."

Eleanor lifted her head proudly; she looked really superb as she spoke. Ah! what a medicine is happiness! The physician giving his patients a prescription which induced it, need not fear but that his name, through all future ages, would rival Æsculapius' own.

"I do not say that I shall not suffer horribly at moments, but I will offer up my suffering as an expiation. With his will or against it, you must save Colonel Enderby."

This was all very well. Bertie smiled and raised his eyebrows. His cousin's enthusiastic treatment of the subject appeared to him both pretty and amusing.

"I have the highest regard for Enderby," he said; "but does it not strike you, Nell, that there may be a slight inconvenience? We were not united during his stay here in exactly the closer bonds of affection."

"Never mind," she answered. "Cecilia is right; your words have greater weight with Jessie than any one else's. She will attend to what you say. You must go soon; you must manage it. Surely," added Eleanor, very sweetly and gently, "if I am willing you should go—I realize the risk—you can hardly refuse?"

Parker made her own comment on Mr. Ames' return. Whether she apprehended all the consequences likely to result from that event, I cannot say; but she selected a characteristic manner of expressing her general sense of approval.

"I think you might as well get those new sets of towels, after all, ma'am," she said, as she brushed out her mistress's masses of fine, dusky hair that night.

Eleanor turned round upon her with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Parker, you are impertinent," she cried. "Why may I as well get them?"

"Oh, you know your own mind best, of course, ma'am," returned the other woman calmly. "You make me pull out your hair dreadfully, when you twist about like that. You never could sit quiet and sensible to have your hair brushed ever since you were a child. Only these towels, as I told you, are wearing as thin as thin—they don't pay for my time mending; and I thought we mightn't be going out of housekeeping quite so soon, after all."

Parker ended up with a very audible sniff.

And the polemics, and the lives of the saints, and the blessed repose of a religious house, and the infinite consolations of the holy Oratorian? Ah! well, sweet reader, we must not ask too much from poor human nature. Mr. Bertie Ames had come back, you see, and that had made a difference to the relative value of these things.

CHAPTER II.

DR. SYMES COMES NEAR CAPPING A FIRST MISTAKE BY A SECOND.

MRS. JACK ENDERBY'S ball was a great success. Everybody said so, and in the verdict of the multitude is truth—at least, so democracy, the gospel of the present era, assures us. The whole entertainment went off admirably; it had all been done generously and in the very best style. One disturbing episode did indeed occur in the course of the evening, which to a moralist of a morbid and gloomy temper might have served as a text for a depressing discourse. One member of the assembled company did, unquestionably, have his measure of enjoyment lopped off painfully short. But there—let us by all means avoid the soft swampy places of over-tender sentiment; and, taking our stand on the solid ground of common-sense, proclaim aloud the consolatory doctrine of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This over-careful consideration of the fate of a unit, here and there, betokens a lamentable smallness of vision. We will base ourselves broadly; stand with our legs very wide apart; and so keep our balance, spite of certain qualms and queasiness. Shall the instruments of the musicians be silenced, and the quick feet of the dancers be stayed; shall the cold baked meats be left untasted, and the wine undrunk, because one individual has had the ill-luck to fall a victim to some of those manifold evils that lie ever in wait for the unhappy sons and daughters of men?

No, indeed, says the wise world; such things are altogether too common to affect us. Are they not happening somewhere all day long? Rather, then, let the pulse of the valse beat faster and more urgently; and the lithe young figures drift more rapidly across the gleaming floor, while the hot air of the ball-room palpitates with light and emotion. Dance on, cries the wise world: let the beautiful madness have its fullest sway. Its time is short, at best. The feverish hours are passing, hastening, fleeting onward towards the chill solemnity of the winter dawn; even as the fantastic, passionate, irresolute lives of the dancers are fleeting onward towards the pale silence and immutable calm of death. Therefore, dance on, cries the world—dance till you forget those that suffer and that are stricken; forget the anguish, and the groaning, and the sweat of blood.

Persons of good taste and breeding will always help you to do

this, for they are first-rate professors in the fine art of living. The rack, and the whip, and the thumbscrew, and those other ugly inventions of the enemy that men have named accident, disease, decay, insanity, are to be found under all roofs alike, it is true; but well-bred persons have at least the grace to hide them away in some far-removed and thick-walled chamber, and to double-lock the door of it. Dance on, then, fearlessly; in good society you are not likely to be offended by hearing the hiss of the lash, or the squeal of the pulleys, or the desolate moan of the victim. And even if, by chance, these unpleasant little matters should not be quite well managed, and a strange discordant echo should rise, now and again, above the swift rush of the melody, and the soft rhythmical sweep of women's draperies—dance on still. To the worldly wise, who have truly learnt their lesson, the neighbourhood of possible pain only lends a keener edge to the appetite for present pleasure. Dance, dance while you can. The time is short, and who knows but his own turn may come next? Dance on; only remember when your turn does come—as come it most surely will—that you owe a certain debt to the society which has played with you, laughed with you, flattered you, loved you, too, after its fashion, through all the days of your vanity. Rally what remnants of manhood may be left in you; put a good face on the matter; give as little trouble as possible; go away decently and good-temperedly into that thick-walled chamber with the torturers, for escape is hopeless; and so, indeed, silence is best.

Despite all this sermonizing, the fact remains that Mrs. Jack Enderby's ball was a great success. Everybody came, from Lord Sokeington with his omnibus and carriagefuls driving over the ten miles from Pentstock Castle, to Mrs. Mumford, the parson's wife at Priors Bassett—a Madonna-like lady of an innocently surprised, sour-sweet countenance, who for years has greeted all local festivities in the same puce-coloured silk with satin trimmings, and white lace shawl, sometime her wedding-veil.

Cecilia Farrell, too, was at the Bassett Darcy ball. She would very willingly have stayed away, it is true; but Mrs. Murray would not hear of it. Cecilia must go. Mrs. Murray managed to tuck her into the vacant place in a fly hired by her neighbour Mrs. Latimer for this auspicious occasion. Yet further, Cecilia must be resplendent. Mrs. Murray was playing that same old game of hers: and this time she believed she had sighted so valuable a possible son-in-law that the expenditure of a handsome number of pounds on a suitable costume for Cecilia was a mere triviality. Mrs. Farrell herself, in her fine gown, was far from happy. She felt a good deal like the proverbial dog at a fair. What had she to

do with all this light and warmth and merriment; with these wide, bright, crowded rooms, and their shifting show of wealth and beauty?

Mrs. Jack Enderby welcomed her genially enough; but there had been a lurking criticism and kindly amusement in her bold, comely face as she did so. Augusta, like most women of a robust physique and healthy habit of mind, entertained a kind of secret contempt for the less successful members of her own sex. This, too, was the hour of Augusta's triumph. She gloried in sight of her great stately house full of guests. Her heart swelled with pride as she stood there to greet one well-known face after another—knowing that half the county, and half the county's men-servants as well, were eating and drinking and diverting themselves freely at her expense. This prodigal, open-handed instinct of hospitality is rather a savage virtue, perhaps; but I venture to think it a very real one, all the same.

And Mrs. Jack's exultation on the present occasion was the more excusable, in that she had served her apprenticeship to narrow means and hard work pretty thoroughly during those years spent in the ramshackle old rectory at Cold Enderby; when the monthly nurse was a periodic visitor; when the children grew so fast out of the best frocks that it was so difficult to replace; when a rise of a penny in the pound in poor's-rate taxed all her philosophy; and when Jack went out farming or shooting every day in the week, to find himself, late on Saturday night, with hardly a word written of to-morrow's sermon. Now Augusta was agreeably sensible of having escaped out of the slavery of Egypt, and taken up her quarters in land flowing with milk and honey. Strong in the enjoyment of her own success, she was a little disposed to look down on women less happily situated than herself. Prosperity too often has a hardening influence even on the really good-hearted.

And so poor Cecilia Farrell, as usual, represented the death's-head at the feast—or, to speak accurately, would have represented it, if anybody had been at leisure to observe her. Mr. Drake looked after her, it is true, in his kind fussy way at intervals; but Mr. Drake was in a small turmoil of self-importance. He had constituted himself aide-de-camp to Mrs. Jack Enderby, and rushed about wildly—finding partners for pretty girls, securing seats and suppers for elderly ladies, dancing himself vigorously between whiles, and pervading space generally, till it seemed probable that only a direct interposition of Providence would prevent his falling incontinently into an apoplectic fit.

"With that red face and short neck," as Mrs. Mumford

remarked severely to her excellent spouse, "it is really very dangerous for a middle-aged man to be so active."

Mrs. Farrell, then, sat against the wall and watched the movement and gaiety; and with all her goodness she could not banish a sense of injury from her mind. It seemed hard to be no longer young and attractive; to be passed over and generally out of it. Brilliant young people laugh lightly at us old frumps, male and female; but we, the said frumps, unfortunately retain our sensibilities, even when hairs are grey, and complexions dulled, and symmetry of figure is merged in fat or reduced to curious angularity of outline. In our best moments we laugh with them. It is a ridiculous thing to grow old, of course: nevertheless the laughter leaves a sting behind it, which rankles a good deal at times. Decidedly Cecilia did not relish her part of death's-head at the feast; and it was with a distinct lightening of the heart that, towards the middle of the evening, she perceived the high conical skull and odd goat-like physiognomy of Dr. Symes, as that gentleman—hugging the wall to avoid collision with the dancers—made his way slowly round to the spot where she was stationed.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Farrell, at last! I have spent the last half-hour in searching for you. Mrs. Latimer told me, when I first entered the ball-room, that you had driven over with her and her daughters. I was sincerely glad to learn you were here. This species of scene," continued the doctor, waving his hand with a certain magnificence towards the dancers—"this species of scene should have an intrinsic value even in the eyes of us who are merely spectators. It represents an important, and, I would add, a recurrent necessity of our strangely complex constitution—the necessity for recreation. Personally I am a strong advocate of recreation. I regard it as a bulwark against a thousand insidious moral and physical temptations. I would say to every one,—Cultivate a capacity for innocent amusement; unstring the bow, at times; give the mind and spirit a holiday."

The doctor settled himself comfortably on the lounge beside Cecilia. He was sensible of a condition of serene well-being just at the present time, which disposed him to be communicative. He did not disguise from himself the sources of that sense of well-being. He was perfectly aware that, analytically examined, it resolved itself into a matter of so much warmth, light, and sympathetic, sensuous excitement, reinforced by an excellent supper and a certain quantity of alcohol. Mortimer Symes was neither of the age nor of the squeamish way of thinking, that is suspicious of all sensations that do not clearly take their rise in

the higher faculties of our being. If, in themselves, the sensations were agreeable, he did not think it incumbent upon him to reject them because they did not hail from a finely intellectual region. The excellent man had arrived at a temper wherein he was glad to pick a modest posy of pleasure anywhere by the wayside, having quite ceased to expect that Fortune would ever turn him loose in fairy gardens and bid him fill his hands with priceless exotics. He felt comfortable and communicative. He wanted to moralize at his ease; and Mrs. Farrell, he knew, was a model listener.

"Yes," he said, leaning back and letting his keen, observant eyes wander slowly over the bright swaying throng:—"I would say to every one, specially to those who lead solitary lives and are of a serious habit,—Retain as long as possible your capacity for amusement; add constantly to the sum of your lighter experiences. One or two acquaintances of mine have been a little surprised at seeing me present to-night. I appear to them, I imagine, slightly out of place. But I know how much I gain by occasionally attending a reunion of this description—gain, not only in the way of immediate entertainment, but in the enlarging of my comprehension of my fellow-creatures. Solitude deadens the sympathies. I would go even further. The exclusive society of only a few persons, however deeply beloved those persons may be, is calculated sadly to narrow and obscure the outlook on life. The general is tonic; the particular—the particular——"

Mortimer Symes stopped abruptly at the climax of his aphorism; for the "particular" arrested his attention sharply just then, in the shape of a tall, good-looking young fellow, with a fresh beardless face, and a girl in a gleaming, pale yellow dress, that floated out like a delicate foam-bell from her charming waist as she danced.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "that is a rather dangerously pretty performance."

Cecilia followed the direction of the doctor's gaze. It was the first time she had seen Jessie since her wretched and mortifying visit to the Manor House. That she might learn something about Jessie and her husband, and how they were going on, had in a measure reconciled Cecilia to the distasteful idea of this Bassett ball. She did not want to come personally in contact with either of them; but she longed to know. Now she knew something, in any case—namely, that Jessie was going on in a sufficiently gay and indifferent manner.

Mrs. Farrell clasped and unclasped her grey-gloved hands as they rested upon her black-lace lap rather nervously.

"I am afraid I ought to have tried to find an opportunity of telling you sooner, Dr. Symes," she said. "I did no good, only harm, when I went to Mrs. Enderby. You remember about it?"

The doctor turned to her with his blandest smile. To have spoken first on this embarrassing subject would, he felt, have been indelicate, although he had been curious, for some while, to know the result of Mrs. Farrell's mission.

"I am sure you did your very best, my dear madam," he answered; "and no one can do more than that."

"It was a miserable, miserable failure," she continued, in a tone of distress. "Everything went wrong. I was not fortunate, I suppose, in my way of putting it; and Mrs. Enderby would not listen to me. I hope it isn't wrong, Dr. Symes," she added, in a low voice, "but I am almost afraid of her. She was so strange that afternoon. She doesn't seem to be touched by what would certainly touch anybody else. I don't want to say anything unkind or ill-natured; but she is not, somehow, quite like other people."

"Ah! you feel that too," returned the doctor.

He nodded intelligently—as one who could say a good deal more if he chose to do so—and then, throwing his head back, sank into a rather easier attitude on the lounge.

"I have made nearer acquaintance with Mrs. Enderby since we last discussed this subject. A singular nature—a curious and interesting study—so highly developed in some directions, and undeveloped in others. Perfectly true, Mrs. Farrell; I have feared lately that I had asked you to perform a very hard task. Undeniably Mrs. Enderby would be remarkably difficult to appeal to under some circumstances."

Cecilia hesitated; finally she said:—

"Do you mean that she's deficient in any way?"

"Oh dear, no!" replied Dr. Symes with alacrity; "not in the least deficient in the ordinary acceptation of the term. I should say, on the contrary, that this young lady—though really I must apologize for submitting so charming a person to a cold-blooded, critical analysis—I should say she was a trifle over-vitalized. The body responds almost too quickly to the instincts and emotions; it interprets them with too great readiness. Second thoughts, you know, are admitted to be best, and this young lady, I fancy, never arrives at second thoughts at all; but speaks and acts entirely from the impulse of the moment—with amazing spontaneity, in fact. And that is perilous," he added meditatively—"especially for others."

Cecilia looked up inquiringly. The words, though she did not comprehend them, conveyed a disturbing impression to her mind.

"Our creed, my dear Mrs. Farrell—our creed requires us to believe that every human being is the possessor, for joy or sorrow, of an immortal soul. Otherwise"—Mortimer Symes spoke with a touch of the wholesale manner—"were I free, in short, to follow my own conclusions—I bow to the authority of my creed, of course, and abstain from following them—I should venture most seriously to question the truth of that doctrine."

The doctor was becoming alarmingly expansive; but the general sense of well-being, already alluded to, unlooses the tongue to a pernicious extent; and frequently tempts a man to give voice to his deepest thought—which had better be hidden—instead of to his superficial and conventional thought, which may be presented to society with perfect safety.

Just at that moment, however, the stream of his eloquence suffered a violent check. A mild, lanky youth—who undoubtedly stood in need of a few lessons from some professor of dancing, judging from his extremely erratic method of progression—suddenly deposited a ponderous lady, in cinnamon and old-gold-coloured garments, plump on the doctor's lap.

"Beg-your-pardon," ejaculated the youth, all in one word; and, recovering at the same moment both his own footing and his grasp on his partner's waist, plunged away with her again into the crowd.

"Ah, good gracious! how deeply embarrassing!" cried the doctor, rubbing his knees, bruised with the heavy weight so unexpectedly let down upon them.

Then he cleared his throat, and arranged himself a little.

"To resume," he observed with dignity. "That the germ of a soul is always present, I will not deny. But in rare and curious cases it seems never to develop out of the embryonic condition. Some persons are essentially too natural and healthy to produce soul. I speak colloquially. To put it in a more accurate form—every nature has only a certain capacity. If the body is highly vitalized, and the intelligence highly vitalized too, there is not force enough left over to promote active development of spirit. We are coming to acknowledge that the moral constitution may be subject to congenital disease and defect, just as the physical constitution has long been admitted to be. Why not carry on the analogy one step farther, and allow that the spiritual constitution may be radically and irretrievably defective likewise? My professional experience, I own, inclines me to hail thankfully any lessening of the load of human responsibility."

Dr. Symes drew himself up short. He became aware that he had wandered away along paths of metaphysical speculation, to

a wild and unfamiliar region, through which courtesy hardly sanctioned his inviting Mrs. Farrell to follow him, in her best gown and grey kid gloves.

"But really," he said, with his blandest smile, "I trespass on your forbearance most unwarrantably. I advocate recreation, and then proceed to weary you with recondite and, I fear, unorthodox questions. Forgive me, Mrs. Farrell. An indulgent listener too often makes an inconsiderate speaker."

Cecilia, however, was not light in hand. Her apprehension was slow; but it was tenacious. She sat, hearing the gay yet pathetic music, the buzz of conversation and rustle of women's garments, and seeing the involved and quickly changing figures of the dance, in mute astonishment, almost horror. To her conscience, formed in a definitely religious mould, accepting unreservedly the Puritan solution of the enigma of existence, the doctor's ingenious little theories were not unorthodox merely, but injurious, bewildering, terribly subversive.

"Do you mean to say you think the person we were talking of has no soul?" she inquired, in a scared whisper.

"Oh, you must not take my words too seriously, my dear madam," he answered. "I spoke as one speaks in the borderland between absolute truth and mere fancy. I spoke in what I may designate as a pseudo-scientific spirit. The tongue is an unruly member, you know; and leaves strict veracity too often far behind it. I must try to justify myself. I mean just this."

He sat up.

"Ah! there, observe her now," he cried quickly.

Jessie in her gauzy draperies passed close by them, valsing with Charlie Colvin—she had been valsing with him pretty nearly all the evening, by the way. They both danced well; but their dancing had a peculiar quality about it; it was more than simply graceful and accurate. If I may indulge for a moment in Dr. Symes' rather fanciful way of regarding things, I should describe these two dancers as being animated with a common life. There was a singular concentration—not of purpose, for it was perfectly spontaneous and instinctive, but—of emotion about Jessie, which expressed itself as much in the action of her supple, rounded figure as in her face. There was a fulness of enjoyment in every easy, gliding motion. She danced not as the ordinary young lady dances in the ordinary ball-room, with a consciousness of chaperones and propriety in the background, with a touch of nervousness about the set of her skirt, and harassing suspicions that she is beginning to look heated. Jessie yielded herself up to her dancing with an extraordinary singleness of purpose. The

whole woman danced, careless alike of past and future, with the victorious ease and grace of overflowing health and gaiety—with no desire, no aspiration, beyond the enjoyment of the present moment.

As Mrs. Farrell watched her, in the light of her conversation with the doctor; as she noted the exquisitely, harmonious movements; the clear, unflushed cheek; the even rise and fall of the girl's bosom; the passionless content of her eyes as the turns of the valse brought her face for a few seconds into view;—as, I say, she marked all this, Mrs. Farrell shrank back into herself, dazzled, amazed, almost terrified at the vista of undreamed-of possibilities that opened before her.

Dr. Symes looked at her closely. He perceived that she saw —dimly and brokenly, perhaps, but still saw—that which he had desired she should see.

"Human nature is very complicated," he began, a trifle sententiously. "You cannot enclose or account for its infinite intricacies under any single system, Mrs. Farrell. I am no scholar, in the technical sense of the term, I regret to say. I am a mere dabbler in the shallows of that prolific ocean of prehistoric fable, which is at once so hopelessly fantastic and so deeply imbued with some of the most obscure and intimate secrets of existence. But in watching that young lady just now, I could not avoid thinking of the ancient conception of a race of beings supplying the missing link between ourselves and the dumb animals about us. I seemed to be carried back, in imagination, to an old, old world—older than right and wrong, older than heaven and hell—a calm, simple, sunny, light-hearted world, where nature reigned; and in which man was but the fairest and cleverest of the beasts that perish, triumphant in his strength and beauty, obeying fearlessly the dictates of his nature, untrammelled by conscience, unburdened by the suspense and anxiety which come of spiritual aspiration."

He paused as for applause; the taste of his own phrases was sweet in his mouth.

Cecilia was not in the least disposed to applaud. Her companion's fine words were of small moment to her on this occasion. She cared not a rap for prehistoric times and the golden age; fauns, nymphs, and satyrs alike were but the *dramatis personæ* of children's story-books to her. But for the modern instance, for the woman Jessie Enderby, she cared intensely. That Dr. Symes —whose talent she respected, whom she liked and admired—should feel justified in hinting such strange and awful things about an acquaintance of her own, a woman to whom she stood in a

peculiar relation, whose hand she had held in hers, whose merry words she had so often listened to with an admiration not unmixed with envy, was to Cecilia simply appalling. To think of Jessie as soulless seemed unspeakably terrible. Decidedly Mrs. Farrell was wanting in imagination. Had the doctor suggested that the girl might be afflicted with kleptomania, or guilty of forgery, it would have been far less painful to her. She had no words adequately to express the feeling that oppressed her.

"Oh, this is all very shocking," she murmured; "very alarming."

"The abnormal is always more or less shocking, I suppose," replied Dr. Symes, gravely. "That the abnormal is bound to place those who come into near connection with it in most difficult and trying situations, I have no doubt. We have not, by any means, seen the end of this singular business yet, I fear, Mrs. Farrell. If Mrs. Enderby—I speak to you quite freely—had a child, it might prove her salvation. It would, I believe, develop the latent higher nature in her. It would give her a soul."

"Ah!" said Cecilia, sadly, "but a child is a fearful responsibility."

"To you, yes," he replied, smiling; "but it would not be much of a responsibility to Mrs. Enderby, I fancy. To her it would be more of a delightful, animated plaything than anything else. If you will pardon my saying so—ladies, I know, are apt to resent the statement—the maternal instinct in its simple form is not a very high one; it is mainly physical. Still, from the development of that instinct, Mrs. Enderby might get an inkling of the meaning of self-sacrifice; and self-sacrifice, I take it, is the true basis and motive power of all true spiritual life. For the first time she would forget herself—she would love."

Cecilia Farrell turned to her companion with a certain dignity; and the blood came into her thin cheeks.

"She has her husband, let her love him," she said sternly.

"Ah! I very much fear nature has failed to supply Mrs. Enderby with any instincts under that head; barring the very common one—we all possess it in a degree—of making the most use possible of a willing slave."

"There, I trust, you are mistaken," said Cecilia, still sternly.

In sympathy she had taken many steps away from Dr. Symes in the last ten minutes.

"I shall be only too happy that events should prove me mistaken in the case in point, my dear madam," he replied. "One is thankful, always, to find that one has overstated the gravity of any matter."

The music had ceased. The room had grown comparatively empty. The sound of footsteps, the confused murmur of voices, now and again a soft outbreak of laughter, wandered in from the hall and passages outside. Poor Cecilia sat still, looking blankly out over the wide, bright space before her. She was pained and perplexed. She was displeased too; and that with one of the few persons who by habitual kindness had won her regard and gratitude.

Dr. Symes had a sense that the harmony of his relation with Mrs. Farrell had been disturbed, and he regretted it. All the more so that, in her late movement of severity, she had claimed both his respect and admiration.

"Under happier circumstances, she might have been a charming woman," he thought. "Poor Colonel Enderby is to be pitied, perhaps, in this also."

It was so obvious to Dr. Symes that the lady was not paying any attention to him, that he permitted himself to take a good long steady stare at Mrs. Farrell. He had certainly never seen her to so much advantage before. She was well-dressed for once; the excitement under which she laboured had both given her dignity and improved her complexion. With all her peculiarities there was an unmistakable effect of good breeding about her. Her faithfulness and devotion commanded Mortimer Symes' sincerest respect. She was far from being brilliant or exciting; but that she was eminently conscientious and dependable there could be no question. Whether the good doctor had talked himself into an unusual state of exaltation, or whether the atmosphere of a ball-room is peculiarly productive of romantic affections, I cannot pretend to say: but it is certain that a notion, which for a long time past had furtively and intermittently haunted the chambers of his brain, began to take form and consistence with surprising rapidity. If that venerable lady Mrs. Murray could be got rid of—and he had devised an excellent scheme for her removal—a man might, Dr. Symes thought, do worse than pass the last stages of his earthly pilgrimage with Cecilia Farrell for a companion.

He cleared his throat and adjusted his tie with an air of preparation.

"My dear Mrs. Farrell," he began, "the garrulity of age, favoured by your courteous attention, has bid fair to run away with me to-night. I fear I have exhausted your patience; and, for myself, have wasted an invaluable opportunity. There is quite another subject on which I greatly desire to say a few words to you."

He paused. Cecilia looked at him; the doctor's manner was extremely ornate.

"You must pardon my speaking of myself," he continued.—"My position is a singularly independent one. I have no near relatives. Such fortune as I possess is entirely at my own disposal. I am not ashamed to say, Mrs. Farrell, that my income is, at the present time, a considerable one, since it is almost exclusively the result of my own exertions. For a professional man I am unusually well off. At my death a not inconsiderable sum must pass into other hands."

So far he had progressed with ease and determination; but, really, it was difficult to go on. Dr. Symes leant forward and gazed earnestly at the polished oak floor between his feet, hoping, apparently, to gain inspiration from the well-set boards.

As to Cecilia, she regarded him with surprised and slightly anxious attention. Confidences invariably agitated her.

"You, Mrs. Farrell, with your quick and genuine sympathy, will readily understand that when my thoughts project themselves forward towards the inevitable close, towards that final journey which awaits us all, they are not untouched with gloom. Why, I ask myself, have I thus toiled and laboured? What is the object of a man amassing wealth—modest wealth, I grant you, as compared with the colossal fortunes of the present day, but still wealth—if he has no child to benefit by it—if no young life is to be beautified and enriched by his past labours?"

Mrs. Farrell made no audible comment. It was trying; she had a great habit of making no comment. Under some circumstances that might be very convenient; just now it was very inconvenient, Dr. Symes thought. He tried to keep up his courage by a mild flight of rhetoric.

"Now that the sun of my existence has, so to speak, passed the zenith, and begun to decline towards the west, I find myself increasingly desirous to create intimate relations for myself, to live no longer in isolation, in solitude, and at a distance from my kind. My dear lady," he said, turning full upon her, and speaking with real feeling, "I envy you your boy. I have wondered, pondered, asked myself many searching questions on this subject. Can we not, I ask you—and I beseech you earnestly not to reply without duly weighing my request—can we not effect a combination of interests—a combination which, I allow, will leave me infinitely your debtor?"

Here the doctor bowed courteously to his companion.

"Will you grant me the privilege of sharing those responsibilities of which you are so sensible? Will you reward my true and reverential affection by——"

But Cecilia interrupted him breathlessly.

"Look, look!" she cried; "there is Philip Enderby dancing —dancing with his wife."

I do not know whether the strength of his professional instincts should be reckoned a credit to him or otherwise; but Mortimer Symes broke off his important discourse with the utmost alacrity, sat up, and peered eagerly among the passing couples for the one to which Mrs. Farrell had drawn his attention.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, with a movement of anger, "what an act of insanity! Our friend Colonel Enderby has an absolute enthusiasm for suicide."

"Oh, go to him," implored Mrs. Farrell, "go to him; stop him. It is some wickedness of Jessie Enderby's. Oh, I can't forgive her!"

The poor woman spoke from the heart, regardless of all minor conventionalities.

"We must not judge the young lady too hastily," returned the doctor, recovering his usual suavity of manner. "To intervene now would be merely to make an inconvenient scene—to put myself hopelessly in the wrong, and destroy all confidence between my patient and myself. Shall we move? I should be glad to make my way towards the door."

With many stoppages and delays Dr. Symes piloted Mrs. Farrell round two sides of the large room. It was really a matter of time and of some difficulty. Various persons hailed the good man as he passed, and refused to let him go away in a hurry; then, too, the room was full again, and it was not easy to dodge the dancers. At last, just by the door leading out into the hall, Mr. Drake, breathless, excited, and redder in the face than ever, met them.

"God bless me," he said, in a low voice, "I thought I never should find you! I don't want to alarm any one; we must keep it quiet. Nobody fortunately saw what happened. Come out here into the hall. Enderby's ill, dying—I don't know what—but they want you. Come away to the library; they've put him in there, poor dear fellow. Awful thing, you know, and with that young wife too."

Talking all the while, and hurrying the doctor along with him, Mr. Drake disappeared within the inner hall.

Cecilia Farrell stood leaning against the wall. She shut her eyes and pressed her long, thin hand hard against her forehead. Dr. Symes and his astonishing and but half-comprehended conversation were blotted out of her mind. Only the image of Philip Enderby remained—Philip Enderby as she had known him, loved him, danced with him over twenty years ago.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH DEATH HAS A MIND TO DANCE TOO.

In order to explain the episode which proved so startling both to Mrs. Farrell and her companion, Mortimer Symes, the kindly reader must be asked to retrace his steps to an earlier period of the evening of Mrs. Jack Enderby's social apotheosis: asked, moreover, to readjust the focus of his spy-glass and contemplate the scene—not from the thoughtless standpoint of the dancers, or from the philosophic standpoint of the doctor, or from the agitated standpoint of Cecilia; but from the simple, practical, and somewhat melancholy standpoint of our friend Philip.

For, alas! things have been going but drearily with poor Philip for some time past; and there would seem to be but small hope of their mending. What with pain, and weakness, and black haunting nervous depression, he has discomfort enough in his own person to make the days pass heavily. Nor is this physical distress all he has to put up with. Struggle as he may, it becomes ever more difficult to hide the signs of his trouble from the eyes of his charming wife. And, ignore them as she may, the burden of her husband's affliction has begun to weigh on her. It could hardly be otherwise since she was so quick and observant. A hundred little indications of the change that had come over him forced themselves upon her; and the girl's humour began to change too. Her sweetness of temper suffered occasional eclipse; she was flighty, capricious, difficult to please. She seemed to be under the impression that she had come into the world with a divine right to be ceaselessly amused: and if amusement failed, so much the worse for the person most bound by his position to supply it, namely, her husband.

The Colonel worked with pathetic diligence to meet his wife's demands for entertainment. He tried to take a deep interest in any trivial matter that pleased her; encouraged her to go out, to entertain; let her satisfy any passing fancy that took her, and spend money in a rather reckless fashion; let her do what she pleased, so long as she seemed happy and treated him with affection;—do anything in the world, in fact, so long as thereby he could stave off her discovery of the miserable truth that he was a disabled, broken-down man, whose life was hardly worth an hour's purchase.

Then Christmas, that penitential season of the financial year,

had come, bringing with it revelations of expenditure so considerably in excess of his income, that Philip had been reluctantly compelled to sacrifice a portion of his capital. He had sold out certain shares, after much bother and worry, to discover, of course, in the end that he had sold them out just at the wrong moment and at a prodigious disadvantage. All this was very far from cheering. If Mr. Bertie Ames or any other of the Colonel's acquaintance were coming to the rescue they had better make haste about it, or they might chance to arrive a little too late.

It has been said, with a somewhat transparent affectation of cynicism, that life would be very tolerable but for its amusements. The phrase sounds well; it has a ring of disillusionment and elegant fatigue; and it is a very agreeable occupation to coquet with fatigue when you yourself are sound and hearty, and to cultivate a mildly disillusioned tone while you retain a lively sense of personal importance and of the value of your own utterances. Happy the man who is still young enough, in heart and feeling, to play a part—especially, perhaps, the part of lofty contempt for the diversions he largely participates in! When, however, through the operation of unkind fate, that phrase concerning life and its amusements becomes practically true for any luckless mortal, and light affectation passes into actual fact, it is a very dismal business indeed.

Philip Enderby had dreaded this particular evening long beforehand. It promised to be little better to him than a weariness and a mockery. He would thankfully have avoided going to stay at Bassett, and have remained quietly at home. But two considerations impelled him to overcome his shrinking from the undertaking. Jessie, notwithstanding her growing waywardness, could not endure to be without him. She demanded that her husband should always be in attendance. There was an uncanny element in the girl's absolute abhorrence of solitude. Not that she was afraid of any of those concrete bugbears of sensitive womanhood—such as accidents, fire, burglars, ghosts, thunder, wind in the chimneys, death-watch, mice, or spiders. Both by day and by night, the young lady's wits were very well about her, and she was by no means conspicuously liable to nervous terrors. Her horror of solitude, like her strange horror of sickness and death, was something spontaneous, impossible to be reasoned over or analyzed, only present and imperative.

Jessie's constant desire for his presence had, during the first sunny months of their marriage, been one of Philip's deepest satisfactions, seeming, as it did, to offer a solid guarantee of the love he so earnestly needed to believe in. Even now, when, alas!

the silver cord of affection was somewhat loosed, it supplied a very real bond of union between the husband and wife:—a bond which Philip, on his part, would have endured anything rather than run the risk of severing. Jessie begged him to go to Bassett; was petulant at his half-expressed reluctance.—It was enough.—He would go.

Then, too, an evil spirit of jealousy had taken possession of the Colonel lately. We must not judge him too hardly; the man was very much in love, and was paying a heavy price for his affections, into the bargain. The time would come—was sensibly creeping nearer—when he must leave this beautiful young creature. He knew it; in a way, he had brought that trial upon himself. But, after he had left her, what would happen? Perhaps it was mean and unworthy in him. I cannot say; it seems to me very excusable. Unquestionably he began to feel bitterly towards other men; began to regard them as his natural enemies: to regard them much as the doomed, barbarian captive must have regarded the blooming, well-fed, Roman noble, casting glances of ill-concealed admiration upon his fair-haired, blue-eyed wife. The moroseness and savagery, which is latent in all truly masculine natures, put up its ugly head at moments, and asserted its existence rather fiercely in Colonel Enderby. Jessie, he felt, was hardly the woman to break her heart over a sepulchral urn, under the shadow of the authorized weeping-willow.

So it came about that, for two reasons, Philip thought it well to go to Bassett Darcy: and being there, he tried to forget his many troubles, and appear as little peculiar as possible. With physical pain to wrestle against almost hourly, with a mental drama, of a sufficiently penetrating character, acting itself out in silence all day long, it is not easy, one must allow, to be perfectly disengaged, urbane, and indifferent. But Philip applied himself with praiseworthy persistence to his own business. It was a hard fight; yet, so far, reason and will bravely maintained the upper hand.

During the earlier hours of the evening he had done his duty by dowagers, various and sundry; had stood about in doorways, indulging in desultory gossip with the non-dancing, male members of the community. Philip had no notion of posing: perhaps he would have impressed both his wife and society at large very much more deeply if he had. He made commonplace observations; got tea for old ladies, and ices for young ones; conversed on the topics of the day in no amazingly original or profound manner; caressed the ends of his moustache; contemplated the toes of his shoes; and, in short, conducted himself

generally as all other gentlemen of good standing habitually conduct themselves at kindred festivities.

Yet, notwithstanding the outward and visible signs of being as other men are, he was vividly aware, all the while, of a delectable figure in a gleaming yellow dress, of a lovely childlike face, full of vivacity and enjoyment. He was aware, too, that this captivating form and countenance was that of his wife,—of the woman he blindly and supremely loved;—aware, finally, that a black figure was always beside her, whose feet beat out the exciting measure of the valse with hers, whose arm encircled her waist, whose face—and, unfortunately for the Colonel's peace of mind, it was almost always the same pleasant, frank, boyish face—expressed very openly the warmest gratification in being the happy partner of this very charming person.

Though he had never happened to see Jessie dance before, Philip had taken the notion of her doing so quite for granted. His own dancing days were over long ago. Gentlemen getting on in years figuring about freely, appeared to him a doubtfully dignified spectacle; but, to place any embargo on his wife's enjoying herself after this manner, would have seemed to him a most tyrannical act of selfishness. Now, however, he experienced —even in the midst of a series of confidential communications from that responsible and important person, Lady Melvin, on the delightfully shocking subject of a certain well-known scandal in high life—an increasing sense of irritation and dislike, at last, of unreasoning hatred of this valse—of the langourous, enervating sentiment of the music, of the rapid, yet poised and harmonious movement of the dancers. Philip sat, and stared, and stared before him at the brilliant, swaying, shifting scene; stared till his brain almost reeled, and the whole thing became to him a madness, a horror, unsubstantial, phantasmal, purposeless. Only two persons in all the whirling, drifting throng, retained their reality to him—Jessie Enderby, his wife, for whose peace of mind and daily entertainment he was painfully draining the springs of his own life dry; and Charlie Colvin, the man whose carelessness—unintentional, it is true—had helped to render that bitter sacrifice necessary.

Philip struggled with himself, as we struggle in dreams, when some unspeakable thing seems to press down on us, paralyzing alike all power of speech and action. Would that hateful melody, with its sweet, voluptuous cadence, never end? Would those two young figures never cease passing and repassing? For a moment the Colonel had a wild fear that he should do some desperate thing—call aloud, commit some unpardonable folly.

"I have it, I assure you, upon the very best authority," murmured Lady Melvin, in her fat, comfortable voice, slowly waving her black fan, and turning a large, impassive countenance upon her companion. "On the very best authority. Isn't it perfectly shocking? What is society coming to, Colonel Enderby? And everybody talks about it too.—Why, girls just out of the schoolroom discuss things now, that gentlemen would hardly have spoken of among themselves, don't you know, after dinner, in my youth."

With a fierce effort at self-control, Philip pulled himself together. He felt he must get away, and that immediately, if he meant to keep his head, and not openly disgrace himself.

Making some vague and incoherent excuse to Lady Melvin—which left that worthy person in a state of combined resentment and mystification—he got up hastily, and made his way towards a smaller and less brightly lighted apartment, opening off one end of the ball-room. This little sitting-room—in which, by the way, Philip had said his last good-bye to his mother long ago—though cleared for dancing, was not apparently very popular with the guests. At the present moment it was wholly deserted.

Pictures of departed Enderbys, somewhat arrogant, high-coloured personages, looked down with their prominent light-brown eyes from out of their heavy gilt frames, as the present head of their house moved with unsteady steps across the room. Philip felt half suffocated; he wanted silence and darkness. Above all, he wanted air—air to relieve this horrible, choking, stifling sensation. The floor, the walls, turned and swam in his uncertain vision; and all the while he still seemed to see those two gay young figures, dancing, dancing, before him.

"Am I going mad?" he cried half aloud, as he dragged back one of the thick curtains hanging across the bow-window at the end of the room.

Behind the curtains was a space formed by the projection of the window. Colonel Enderby threw himself down on the cushioned window-seat, and unhitching the catch of the tall narrow casement, leant out into the chill quiet of the winter night. The sounds from the ball-room hardly reached him here, behind the screening curtains, which had fallen back again into their place behind him.

Outside, the night was frosty and starlight. The ground showed a dusky white, powdered over with a light coating of snow that had fallen early in the day. Immediately under the window, was the broad gravel terrace, running along the southern and eastern sides of the house. Beyond, were the lawns, sloping

towards the river. A sharp wind drove small, fleecy clouds, here and there, across the solemn deep of the midnight sky, making the keen glittering stars seem to drive with them in a wild aerial race.

To Philip the biting frost and wind brought a certain measure of relief. But, still, over the pale lawns those two figures, the light and the dark one, seemed to him to drift on dancing, dancing still, away down towards the impenetrable blackness of the wood and river. Recognizing it all the while to be a mere hallucination, generated of weakness and illness, yet, with a sort of terror, deeply moved, straining his eyes to pierce the half darkness, Philip watched the phantom slowly fade and vanish into the night.

He could not think clearly. He only knew that he was suffering; that he was the sport of his own juggling impressions; that a feverish misery and anxiety possessed him. Supporting himself with one hand against the stone mullion of the window, and resting the other upon the ledge outside, Colonel Enderby leaned out into the cold still semi-obscurity. He wanted to avoid hearing even the faintest echoes of the light, pulsing footsteps, and of that sweet valse; and to steep his soul in the calm silence that reigned without.

He had been, however, but a few minutes at the window, when his attention was attracted by an indistinct object moving along the terrace. At first the Colonel feared he was still the victim of some cerebral delusion; but the moving object took unmistakable shape as it came nearer.

It was only a small dog—Matthew Enderby's old wire-haired terrier, which, along with all that unamiable old gentleman's other goods and chattels, had come into the possession of his son Jack. The poor little brute had wandered out of the house to escape the stir and bustle earlier in the evening; and now was trotting disconsolately about, vainly searching for some quiet way of slipping indoors again.

Just as he came under the bow-window, the dog's feelings apparently got the better of him. He sat down on the snowy gravel, threw up his grey, bristly muzzle, and broke into a long dreary howl.

Philip spoke to the dog and tried to quiet it; but the creature refused to be pacified. Again the grey muzzle went up. Again the long wailing cry rang out through the keen, frosty air.

The Colonel was not naturally superstitious; but his late sensations had left him shaken, and curiously excited. The dog squatting there in the dim light, and howling, was strangely agi-

tating to him. He tried to drive it away; but it would not budge. At last, Colonel Enderby moved back and half closed the window; then the dog got up and silently trotted away round the front of the house.

As he closed the window, Philip became aware that he was no longer alone. Two persons were talking together, on the other side of the curtains.

"No, it's really very provoking! I don't think it's fair that a married woman should take complete possession of one of our best dancers in this sort of way. I've known Charlie Colvin for years. He was at Eton with my brothers, you know; and he always kept in our set. He used to be so jolly if we'd got anything going on at Melvin's Keeping. He was like one of us, don't you know, till he came to know her this winter."

The speaker was evidently a girl. Both her sentiments and the irritated tone of her high clear treble testified to the fact.

A man answered quickly, in a good-natured, bantering way:—

"Yes, poor Colvin's very much gone on Mrs. Enderby, certainly. She's awfully pretty, and he doesn't mean any harm in the world, you know. But I think it's silly to get into that sort of state myself."

"There's a frightful draught here," observed the girl. "Let us go back into the other room. He is making the most of his opportunities to-night, in any case. She's a fearful little flirt. I've counted——"

The young lady's skirts rustled over the bare floor, and her words died away in the distance.

The shock administered by this conversation galvanized Philip into very vivid life. If two men had been speaking he would have shown himself at the end of the first sentence; but he could not make a scene with a lady. He had been compelled to listen and to wait. All his physical ailments, all his morbid perturbations and distresses, were forgotten in those few searching moments. Jessie, his wife, his darling, was lightly spoken of.

Colonel Enderby flung aside the heavy curtains, careless of who might see him, and stepped out into the room, strong, steady, resolute as he had been on the best day of his life. Indeed, he would not have been quite a pleasant man to cross just then. His face was set like a flint, and there was an ominous blaze in his blue eyes.

It so happened that almost the first person he came across was Jessie herself. She was standing just inside the door of the ball-room, with a little group of men about her—among them Ashley Waterfield, and his wife's *protégé*, Mr. Lewis Vandercrup—

a thin, neat-featured young man, with preternaturally small hands and feet—one of the Melvin boys, and the red-haired parson from Priors Bassett, who was chuckling in a stout, unctuous way, and murmuring:—

"Ah! very good, very good indeed, Mrs. Enderby."

"Pardon me," said the Colonel, as he elbowed his way through the group, which melted to right and left as he advanced.

The excellent divine lingered longest, not being quick to take a hint. But even he, looking at the new-comer, had an inkling that there was something a trifle dangerous in his aspect; and ended by tacking off rather hurriedly in the direction of his puce-silk arrayed wife.

"Well, if I ever saw a man look as if he was in a devil of a rage, it's Enderby," observed Ashley Waterfield to his companion, Mr. Vandercrup, as he lounged away.

Jessie, however, greeted her husband with her most bewitching of smiles. She was as merry as a cricket, as bright as a bird.

"Where have you been, Philip?" she asked, not giving him time to speak. "You were talking to Lady Melvin just now. From my heart I pitied you! Ah, but that woman is a consummate bore! And then you disappeared. I looked for you; I could not see you. Poor, dear Philip; she was, perhaps, a trifle too overpowering, even for you."

Jessie gave herself a little shake.

"Are you not glad?" she said. "I am having a ravishing evening."

The girl's humour, delicious though it was, was hardly calculated to clear Colonel Enderby's path of difficulties; but the fire both of his love and his anger burned fiercely in him still.

"Come away, Jessie," he said briefly. "I want to speak to you."

She gave him a quick, inquiring glance; then threw herself up, with a pretty touch of dignity, and went into the little empty room beyond. About the centre of it she stopped and turned round.

"Well?" she said, with a note of interrogation in her tone.

More than once Jessie had told her husband that it became him to be excited. Undoubtedly, as the Colonel stood in front of his wife now, he looked extremely well. Jessie remarked it—there were very few things indeed that she did not remark—and it pleased her.

"Ah! *mon ami*," she cried, "but what have you done to yourself? You are splendid, you are admirable."

Colonel Enderby's face did not relax.

"Look here, Jessie," he said slowly; "you know I don't interfere

with you, as a rule. I don't ask you to do anything unreasonable; but something has occurred to-night—never mind what, I cannot tell you,—it was infernally unpleasant"—Colonel Enderby ground his teeth together in a sudden fury—"which obliges me to demand a promise from you. Promise me, Jessie, that you won't dance with that man, Colvin, again to-night."

There was a moment's silence; then Jessie answered, gaily—

"You are still splendid; but, unfortunately, my dear Philip, you ask an absurdity. Why should I not dance with the young man again? I grant you he is a simple creature; a little like that"—she shrugged her white shoulders and spread out her hands daintily—"barbarian, stupid, you know. Still, he is nice-looking, and he can dance, but dance——"

Jessie nodded her pretty, curly head with an air of profound appreciation.

The Colonel's expression remained sternly determined.

"I cannot tell you why I ask this, my dear wife," he said quietly. "I would not pain and disgust you by giving you my reasons. But the fact remains, Jessie; I'm in no laughing mood, and this is no laughing matter. Trust me—in this I know best—and give me your promise."

"You become importunate," she answered, looking at him curiously. "To be importunate is to run the risk of being tiresome. Dance with me yourself, then, if I am surrounded with these melodramatic and mysterious perils. It would be a little commonplace, perhaps, to dance with one's husband; but it would be safe enough in any case. I must dance, you see; and I have refused the others."

Jessie laid her hand lightly on her husband's arm.

"Come," she said, smiling at him with a touch of malice—"shall we go? They are beginning to play another valse. I must dance, and to dance I must have a partner. It lies between Mr. Colvin and you."

Philip was in a condition in which the mind refuses to consider possible contingencies; in which the whole tide of impulse rushes headlong in one direction. Careless of consequences, conscious only of the immediate demand of the present, he answered after but a moment's hesitation.

"Come, then," he said—"I'll valse with you, Jessie. As well that way as any other!"

"Eh! but that is not a very courteous way of accepting my favours," she responded, a trifle taken aback. "Supposing you dance badly? It is a fearful little experiment; but I resign myself. I am ready—now!"

In speaking the girl had made her way back into the ball-room; and in a minute more they were out in the thick of the spinning, swirling throng.

How will he stand it? Faster and faster grows the valse-time, faster and faster Jessie's feet fly over the polished floor. Once round the big room, dodging, twisting, slipping in and out between the racing couples, and the Colonel tries to halt.

"Go on, go on, this is nothing; you dance superbly, Philip," whispers the girl.

And so on again; who cares for the risk and danger, the folly, the madness of it? On again with a swift, delicious rush, motion answering instinctively to the enchanting lilt of the music; on again, round the wide, bright room. How will he stand it, indeed?

At the end of that second turn the Colonel paused close to the door.

"Ah! it was exquisite!" cried Jessie, radiant with pleasure. "Why have you hidden your talents like this, Philip? I am delighted with you. I want to go on for ever, and ever, and ever."

But Colonel Enderby had turned deathly faint and ill. Though his wife was standing beside him, her hand resting with a light pressure on his arm, her laughing face looking up into his, he could not see her clearly. A mist seemed to come up before him and blot out all material objects. Look where he would, he could only see those two figures again, the light and the dark one, dancing, always dancing, till the whole world turned with them as they turned.

He pushed his way back through the little crowd standing about the doorway, into the deserted room behind. This was horrible; he drew his hand across his eyes with a fierce gesture. He went deadly pale, and a cold sweat broke out over his forehead. He was aware of an agony of pain, which cut and stabbed at his heart, and seemed to drive like sharp sword-thrusts right through him. Jessie had followed him, pulling the door to behind her. Hardly knowing what he did, he clutched at her bare arms to save himself from actually falling.

"Ah, good God!" he gasped, "I can't bear it.—Promise me, Jessie, as I have loved you—promise me what I asked, now."

The sudden weight thrown on her, made the girl stagger for a moment; but she recovered herself again immediately. Her rounded, white arms were like bars of iron under Philip's desperate grasp. The laughter had died on her lips and in her eyes. Her face grew hard, set, almost old. She was perfectly calm and quiet

as she looked hastily round for some help or way of escape. It took her but a few seconds to realize the full meaning of the situation.

"Philip," she said, in a low, incisive voice, "if you are going to be ill you must come away. People will see you here."

Exerting all her strength, she half led, half dragged her husband across to a door at right angles to the bow-window. Disengaging one hand, she opened it, and, setting her back against it to keep it open, forced him to enter the room within;—a large dark library, with a faint smell of old volumes and leather bindings pervading it, in which, just now, all the furniture from the other rooms had been huddled away, in most admired confusion, to make space for the many guests. The door remained half open, letting in a narrow shaft of light, that slanted, sharp-edged and definite, across a space of carpeted floor, and on to the chaos of piled-up chairs and tables behind. The mass of furniture, with its confused, half-discovered shapes of familiar objects, had a weird effect about it, forming as it did a background to the graceful form of the girl, in her shimmering ball-dress, and to that of the man whom she supported.

"Can you stand alone?" asked Jessie, suddenly breaking the silence with her clear tones.

She turned away, and with all her force dragged a chair out from the stack of furniture. Things slipped and fell away behind it as she did so, with a rattle and snap of dry breaking wood.

"Sit down," she said.

Philip obeyed her mechanically.

He hardly knew what had taken place during the last five minutes. The racking pain, the sense of suffocation and faintness, the penetrating physical misery, had swallowed up all distinct consciousness. Only when his wife turned and left him, without another word, without a sign of tenderness, did he realize the hideous thing that had happened.

"Jessie, Jessie!" he called aloud after her, putting out his hands in the blind darkness.

But there was no voice, no answer; only the clicking of the lock as the handle of the door turned on the outside and it slipped back into the catch, and the quick beat of footsteps hastening away across the boarded floor without.

CHAPTER IV.

MAN AND WIFE.

CIRCUMSTANCE is cruel to some people: and, at the risk of appearing to deal in paradox, I submit that circumstance was cruel to Jessie Enderby. Under other conditions society might have profited by her charm, her brilliant and inexhaustible gaiety; and never have dreamed of the lamentable wants in her moral and spiritual constitution. Just those demands happened to be made upon her that she was unable to meet. Let circumstance take the blame, in part at least; and let us spare the woman as much as we may.

Her one impulse was to get away. When the library door was fairly closed behind her, she paused only for a moment; and then turned and ran—as a scared child runs, headlong, not daring to stay or look behind it—across the room, down a long dim corridor, and into the inner hall, whence the main staircase leads to the upper part of the house. Here Jessie stopped. She was breathless; half with the haste of her own wild pace, half with a strong nervous reaction, following the coolness and determination she had shown during those terrible minutes in the library. In her whole life she had never experienced anything like this before. She was wholly possessed with a frantic rage and terror.

Across from the supper-room on the other side of the outer hall, passing among the strolling couples who had wandered out from the ball-room, with his stiff, erect, soldierly bearing, came Berrington, a tray of glasses in his hand.

Jessie waited till he reached the foot of the staircase, and then stopped him with a sharp, imperative gesture.

"Colonel Enderby is ill," she panted out, in short, broken sentences—"ill in the library. Go to him. Find Mr. Drake. Don't stand there staring at me; go to him, I say!"

Berrington looked at her in amazement. Her face was blanched, her eyes wide open; she pressed her hands hard against her heaving bosom.

"Are you idiotic?" she cried passionately. "He is ill, I tell you—alone there, don't you understand? Go to him."

Berrington set down his tray—regardless of appearances—on the centre table in the inner hall. His scarred face had a strange expression on it; he spoke almost commandingly.

"You are coming with me, ma'am?"

"No, no. Why should I come? I can't come. Go yourself. You waste time. He is alone in the dark there, I tell you."

Berrington turned away. He had never been over and above fond of his mistress.

Left alone, the girl flung herself down on the lowest step of the wide staircase. She did not cry; but she rocked her body backwards and forwards, and clenched her hands in a perfect paroxysm of passion. We all have known, I suppose, the blank, hopeless fury of childhood—kindled, perhaps, by some very trivial disappointment, prohibition, or mischance—when the dumbly raging little soul dashes itself against the hard walls of fact, and falls back bruised, bleeding, trembling, only to struggle up and dash itself fruitlessly against them again and again. This was what poor Jessie did now. Her feeling was purely selfish. She had not the smallest sense of obligation to her husband, hardly of commiseration for his suffering—only that dreadful furious feeling, that her playthings were all broken, and that nobody was there to mend them; that the world was spoilt to her.

After a while she grew quieter. The dancing had ceased for a time, and people were flocking out into the further hall and dining-room. Jessie's natural vanity came to her rescue; she arranged her dress, which had got disordered in her flight and struggle. She pulled up her long gloves to hide the ugly little marks that Philip's clutching fingers had left on her white arms.—Those marks were very terrible to her. She dragged at her gloves, and almost tore them in the effort to hide them completely from her sight. She began to wonder whether she looked very strange, whether people would discover that something had happened to her, and ask her questions. She felt very small and deserted, too, sitting out on the big quiet staircase alone, with nobody to take care of her. She began to get a trifle shy. Jessie troubled with shyness was indeed a novelty! She could not make up her mind to start off by herself across the outer hall there, where there were such a lot of people; it would look so odd, so awkward.

She shifted her position a little—sat on the corner of the step; and, leaning her back against the wall, tried to appear quite unconcerned, as though she was merely waiting for an absent partner. All these arrangements, and the new sensations which dictated them, quite absorbed the girl's attention.

A shrill voice suddenly interrupted both her thoughts and manœuvres.

"Why, Mrs. Enderby, what are you doing? Are you sitting out? Well, if I sat out, I should get some gentleman to sit out with me. I shouldn't think you would have much difficulty in

getting some gentleman to sit out with you. Here is my cousin, Mr. Vandercrup. Well, if he was not wandering around with me just now, I believe he would be perfectly delighted to sit out with you. But where is your husband gone to? I don't see him anywhere.—Colonel Enderby's the most devoted husband I ever saw, Lewis. I often tell my husband I wish he was as devoted as Colonel Enderby is. Why, now, there is Sokeington. Sokeington, here is Mrs. Enderby sitting out all alone. You come and talk to her. I want to take Lewis to see the family portraits. We can see them very well now the room is empty.—Well, now, Mrs. Enderby, I have provided you with somebody to sit out with. Good-bye."

So saying, Mrs. Waterfield kissed the tips of her fingers; and, wheeling round the somewhat reluctant Vandercrup, bore him away to improve his mind by the study of the defunct Enderbys.

Jessie looked after her with a very mutinous expression of face. She hated Mrs. Waterfield; but then, alas! she hated so many things just now.

Lord Sokeington sat down on the stairs, one step above her, so as to give comfortable room to his long legs. His sister-in-law by marriage, Mrs. Waterfield, often appeared to him a trifle too forthcoming; he did not greatly admire her taste: but, being naturally very amiable and indolent, it was his habit to accept any situation in which he happened to find himself, without getting into a fuss or attitude of rebellion over it.

"Well, here I am, Mrs. Enderby; left on your hands, you see. You must be good enough to do your best to put up with me."

Jessie turned upon him such a pretty, pouting, half-angry, wholly appealing countenance that the young man was quite overcome by it.

"You look tired," he said kindly. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I have been frightened," she answered quite simply. "I should be so glad if you would get me some supper."

Lord Sokeington smiled. The juxtaposition of ideas seemed to him quaint; but he expressed the greatest willingness to procure the young lady all that she desired in the way of supper. He conveyed her across to the dining-room, found a comfortable place for her, and ministered with quite paternal solicitude to her material necessities.

"Eh, Jessie, there you are!" cried Jack Enderby, suddenly catching sight of her. "That's right. I was half afraid we'd seen the last of you too, and that would be a pity—eh, Sokeington, wouldn't it? Drake tells me Philip's got tired of it all and gone

off to bed, lazy fellow. Well, I must be moving. Glad I saw you, Jessie. I was half afraid there might be something wrong."

Under the combined influences of supper and of Jack's speech —which seemed to have a comfortably commonplace quality about it—Jessie shook off the lingering effects of her fright. No doubt Philip was better; there was nothing very serious the matter with him. Jessie began to revive; began to be entertaining; began to ruffle her charming feathers, so to speak, and turn her bright eyes merrily and fearlessly on her surroundings again. Perhaps the playthings were not all broken yet! A rather daring spirit of gaiety returned upon her. Half an hour later she was valsing as light-heartedly as ever with Charlie Colvin in the bright ball-room. Ah! dear world, when we find you are not spoilt, after all, how delicious it is!

But fate had ordained that Jessie's peace of mind should be sadly shaken again before many hours were over.

The grinding of wheels, the red glare of carriage-lamps, the metallic rattle of bits and stamp of horses standing till they were fretted by the frosty air, had all ceased outside the great square house at Bassett Darcy. The last Tullingworth cab, looking for all the world like some gigantic black beetle, had crawled away across the snowy park towards the sleeping village on the upland above. The night of Augusta Enderby's social triumph had passed away, with all its mingled emotions; its pleasures and regrets; its satisfactions, disappointments, and stupidities; its stale jokes, old scandals, new heart-burnings. The dust that had whirled and danced for so many hours, along with the human dancers, was settling down upon the broad bare floors again. The spacious rooms were empty; the flowers hung limp and withering in the close, hot air. Yawning servants moved to and fro, gossiping lazily, putting out the failing lights, clearing away the unsightly tokens of the finished feasting.

The glory had departed, all the fun and frolic, the music and the movement, were over and done with; and the pallid winter dawn—dim and joyless as the eyes of a dying man—was growing along the eastern horizon, above the level stretches of the grass park, when Jessie Enderby—her pretty face wan, her dainty dress torn, her gloves soiled, the freshness gone out of her garments, and the thoughtless pleasure out of her heart—came unwillingly, slowly, along the passage, and entered the large blue bedroom over the hall.

It was the same room in which old Matthew Enderby died, little more than a year ago. The great four-post bed, with its gloomy, stuff curtains, still occupied its old position. The same

old-fashioned mahogany furniture still stood in solid dignity against the walls; and these latter were still hung with a style of wall-paper which, thank goodness, is rapidly becoming a relic of a former dispensation in the matter of house decoration. Stripes of formless and incomprehensible, blue-black roses, surrounded with violently green leaves, alternated with stripes of equally formless and incomprehensible trellis-work in two shades of desolating grey. It was not an encouraging apartment at the best of times, and unless the house happened to be unusually full, Mrs. Jack refused to make use of it at all.

As Jessie came wearily into it now, the room had unquestionably a most forbidding aspect. The fire had burned down to a handful of smouldering cinders in the grate. The shutters stood open, and the curtains were drawn back, letting in the first livid glimmer of the coming day.

The girl set her candlestick down on the table at the bottom of the bed; and then glanced about her with a quick nervous shudder in the ghostly half-light. She looked very young, very slender, like some delicate flower blanched and wilted by rough rain and wind, as she stood there in her crumpled ball-dress.

For a minute or so she waited silently; then growing fear got the better of her.

"Philip! Are you here, Philip?" she cried, softly and hurriedly.

Colonel Enderby came forward out of the dusky corner of the large room. He stopped at the other end of the table by the foot of the bed, and stood looking at his wife. He still wore his evening clothes. His face was old and haggard, and showed almost as livid and ghastly as the glimmering window behind him, in the wavering light of Jessie's candle, as he watched her. His lips were drawn and stiff; he had a difficulty in speaking.

"You are very late in coming, Jessie," he said at last.

"I stayed to the end," she answered, "and then Augusta kept me a long while."

The corners of Jessie's round mouth went down; the rare tears came into her eyes, and ran over her pale cheeks.

"Augusta has said something wicked to me," she went on. "She made me ashamed."

The girl looked up at her husband with the frankest trust in her pretty piteous face.

"I was never ashamed before," she sobbed—"never, never in all my life."

The hours of waiting had been heart-breaking to Colonel Enderby. Desertion, cruelty, disobedience were incomprehensible

to his faithful spirit. Jessie had deserted him basely, she had been cruel. He could not blink the truth, agonizing as it was to him to admit it. Then, this thing had not been done in a corner. Drake and the doctor, in any case, and his servant—possibly half the neighbourhood, by this time—knew that he had come near dying in one room while his wife was dancing in the next. His pride was cut to the quick. Pain we bear silently by ourselves is almost ease, compared with the pain we experience when others look on with surprise and comment and pity. Jessie had done him a terrible injury. Now, as he stood watching her, he asked himself sternly, Should it be peace or war?—and answered that for war there was surely cause enough.

"She said to me something coarse, and wicked. At first I did not understand her; but she explained—she left me in no doubt."

Jessie all the while looked up with that same straightforward demand for sympathy.

"What do I care for one man more than another? I only wanted to dance. As to that stupid boy—oh, I can't talk about it! It is shameful! shameful!"

The girl put her hands over her eyes and sank down in a sad indistinct heap on the floor.

"You didn't mean that, Philip, when you asked me to promise you? You could not be so cruel as to think anything bad, like that, of me? I only wanted to dance. I would have danced all night with you if—if——"

Her voice was lost in the storm of her weeping. Flesh and blood could not stand it. The Colonel came across the little space that divided them, and raised up the slight bowed figure. Yes, it must be peace, after all.

"Before God, Jessie," he said, "I have never doubted you in this matter. You have been thoughtless——"

He paused a moment. To tell her what she had been was to embark in a very ugly statement. Philip loved her too well, after all; he could not bring himself to utter it.

"I have never doubted that in thought and word and deed you are as pure as the day."

The girl flung her arms round his neck and pressed her face against his shoulder, sobbing.

"Comfort me, Philip; comfort me. I am so miserable, and nobody is kind but you."

The same hatred of discomfort and trouble which had caused Jessie to leave her husband now brought her back to him. It was all selfish, alas! and yet the Colonel could not resist it. Sadly, and with a knowledge that there must be a blemish for ever on

that which had been most precious to him, but still honestly and tenderly, he forgave her. How, indeed, could he do otherwise, as she clung to him in that heart-breaking passion of tears—generated in part by physical exhaustion after her long night of dancing; in part by the shock and terror of his illness; and in part, perhaps, by blind gropings towards fuller life of that soul-germ—to quote Dr. Symes—quickened into movement by the hitherto unknown sense of shame;—how, I say, could he do otherwise? He felt dumbly that this was a crisis in Jessie's history. Far be it from him, the man who loved her supremely, to break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax.

He did not even try to improve the occasion by stating his pardon in so many words. She was excited, overwrought, in want of rest. With gentle clumsy fingers Philip helped the pretty quivering creature off with her tumbled finery; helped her to bed; laid the bed-clothes softly up over her: and then, worn and broken by pain and illness as he was, sat down by the bedside in the chill, grey dawning, and held her small cold hands in his, soothing and petting her as a woman might, till the bitter sobs grew less frequent and convulsive, and died down in a little pensive murmur now and then.

"Philip, you are very good; I love you," she whispered.

The Colonel bent over and kissed her. That kiss ratified the treaty of peace.

"Thank you, my darling," he said, "for those sweet words."

Presently she spoke again, still holding his hand, and moving her fingers over the palm of it restlessly.

"We will not stay here; we will go home to-morrow, and forget all these dreadful things, and be happy. We used to be so happy at first in the summer-time."

To poor Colonel Enderby his wife's speech was infinitely pathetic. Alas! the summer-time of their love and of his life, too, was gone past recall. He wondered whether he had not been guilty of a fatal weakness and irremediable error. If he had stuck to his profession, if he had not so humoured Jessie; if he had taken her out into the rough and tumble of life, and made her submit more thoroughly to the ordinary conditions of wifehood; lived for himself and for his duty, treating her as an adjunct merely—a very exquisite one, it is true, but an adjunct still—might he not have saved both her and himself?—In his consuming tenderness for her, he had left her utterly undisciplined, and now—now, perhaps, it was all too late.

Wrung by a sudden perception of his own great folly, Philip Enderby groaned aloud.

Jessie reared herself up on her elbow.

"It won't happen again, Philip," she cried.

The Colonel turned to her gently. The tears came into his eyes. He was to blame; he had been culpably weak and easy with her, and so done her a wrong. The thought made him speak very tenderly to her.

"What won't happen again, my pretty one?" he asked.

"Why—why—you know," she said, her eyes wide with alarm. "It was terrible; I could not bear it. You are better, Philip?"

He looked at her for a moment in silence. His head sank on his breast.

"Jessie, Jessie, have you no mercy?" he cried. "Will you never understand?"

The girl dropped back against the pillows, and began to sob again bitterly.

"Oh, don't scold me. I was getting happier. Please don't scold me," she moaned.

There was a silence. He had made his choice long ago; he could blame no one; he was the author of his own fate. Philip Enderby rallied all the stoicism that was in him. He determined to accept the inevitable, and play his part like a man. He turned to his wife and spoke.

"I cannot tell. We must take what comes," he said. "If it happens again, God helping me, you shall not see it happen. Will that satisfy you, Jessie?"

Jessie put out her hand and stroked his cheek.

"You are very good, Philip," she said again. "Will you stay there by me? Then I think, perhaps, I should fall asleep."

CHAPTER V.

BALAAM'S ASS SPEAKS.

It would be very pleasant, about this period, to throw away the scalpel, and shut up the moral dissecting-room, with all its ugly sights, all its humiliating revelations of the weakness, disease, and incompleteness of fallen humanity: all its sad lessons learnt from the examination of things once lovely, but which have gone wrong, and are lovely no longer—useful only as warnings and advertisements, examples of insidious and all-pervading moral and mental obliquity. Pleasant to forget that excess of one quality implies defect of another—to forget that your generous man will almost certainly prove unjust, your just man harsh and unimaginative;

that sweetness of temper goes hand in hand with want of heart, and the desire to please with paltry vanity; that true love will be weighted with weakness and jealousy; common-sense stultified by lack of zeal; and enthusiasm prone to degenerate into fanaticism and hard indifference to the claims of opponents.

It would be so pleasant to turn our backs on all this distressing knowledge—knowledge which makes simple and direct action almost impossible, which complicates every emotion, modifies every conclusion, teaches one to see a blemish in the fairest face, and to detect seeds of folly and incapacity in the noblest character. —Pleasant to turn our backs on all this, to lock up the dissecting-room, with its melancholy secrets; and go away to fresh open places, where the wind rushes up from the sea, and the gulls laugh overhead in the sunshine; while the bees murmur as they dive into the purple heather-bells, and the rabbits play in and out among the gnarled grey roots of the gorse; and the fat white flowers of the bladder-campion bordering the cliff-edge nod gently and fearlessly—as one who is on excellent terms with both parties —first down to the wrinkled sea below, and then up to the clear sky above. Why should we bother ourselves with all this dreary learning, when the world out-of-doors calls to us with sweet sights and wholesome voices, and an endless spectacle of fecundity and beauty? It would be more profitable, surely, to learn of liberty from the wind and the white-winged sea-gulls; of happy labour from the homeward-bound bee, flying low from the weight of his honey-bags; and of happy leisure from the soft brown rabbits gambolling together among the furze, and ragwort, and bracken?

Unfortunately, however, this is only one side of the picture. If it were not so, one imagines that only born informers and detractors, born lovers of the unsavoury, would ever study the ways of men at all. All pure high-minded persons would abjure the society of their kind; and seek salvation in solitude, in caves of the earth, in forests, and deserts, and mountains.

But, in point of fact, the other side of the picture is evident enough too.—Great black spiders sit in the doorways of their little tunnels, lined with silver threads, there among the heather flowers, and lay cruel hungry hands on the bee, honey-bags and all, just as he, in sober, business-like fashion, is setting off to his hive. The red fox, with his shrewd merry face, comes out of the oak wood, across the valley yonder, in the dewy gloaming; and nips the tender, shrieking rabbit in his neat white teeth, just as it is skipping down into its burrow. Even the gulls themselves are foul greedy feeders; and have by no means a delicate consideration for the sensibilities of individual herrings or mackerel. Out-

of-doors, on the breezy cliff and in the greenwood, pain, injustice, tragedy, are rife too. Bears have not yet ceased to be carnivorous, and developed straw-eating tendencies; and the weaned child will still be safer away from the immediate vicinity of the cockatrice' den. For those unfortunate persons, then, who are cursed with a necessity to look below the surface, and haunted with an insatiable desire to see things as they really are, the moral dissecting-room is hardly a more disturbing place than the seashore or the moorland. And so, reader, after this fruitless attempt to escape from our own shadows, we may as well pick up the scalpel, and go back humbly to science, civilization, and human obliquity again.

The example of human obliquity immediately under consideration is Mrs. Murray. That worthy lady, some few days after the Bassett ball, had reason to believe her daughter Cecilia had received a long letter from Dr. Symes. To say that this interested her is to put the matter very mildly; she was on the tiptoe of expectation.

Cecilia had been silent and preoccupied all day; she had appeared to avoid being alone with her mother. Mrs. Murray waited, watched, hinted, alluded in conversation to subjects which might offer a good excuse for revelations, if Cecilia was that way inclined.

But Cecilia was not expansive. She devoted the morning to Johnnie's lessons, and the afternoon to her district, bordering on the brickfields. After tea she disappeared for a considerable length of time. When at last she came back into the bleak, chintz-covered sitting-room, Mrs. Murray's anxiety to know had reached a height at which concealment was no longer possible. The good lady was consumed with a desire for information; still, with all her courage, she hardly knew how to begin.

She sank back in her chair, folded her hands above her large waist, and watched her daughter with hard, eager, twinkling eyes, as the latter, with a great basket full of coarse flannel and calico, sat down by the centre table and began, not very deftly, piecing together some under-garments destined for the unhappy dwellers in the back streets and by the grimy canal wharfs.

Cecilia fitted in the sleeve of an unbleached shirt several times, wrong way up, having a singular incapacity for mastering the intricacies of double gussets. She looked troubled and tired; her forehead was full of lines, as she held the incomprehensible armhole up close against the lamp, turning it this way and that, and blinking her eyes over it in hesitating perplexity.

For some time Mrs. Murray sat observing her; till, at last irritation getting the better of prudence, she spoke out boldly.

"Cecilia," she said, "you look deplorable. You've got something on your mind."

The suddenness of the address made Mrs. Farrell start, and effectually drove the difficult question of placing gussets back into the obscurity from which it had begun to show signs of emerging.

"You have something on your mind," continued the elder lady. "It is no good denying it. You cannot deceive your mother, Cecilia. I ask no questions. I never demand confidence when it is not freely offered me :—though, considering the way in which I have devoted myself to you, and in which I have considered your interests, it might not seem unreasonable to some people that I should be confided in. But I trust I have learnt to labour for others without hope of reward—to cast my bread upon the waters. Ah, well!"

Mrs. Murray closed her eyes and sighed profoundly.

Cecilia took a couple of pins from between her lips, and stuck them into the shirt-sleeve at random, pricking her fingers sharply in her general confusion.

"I meant to speak to you, mother," she answered; "but I wanted time to think, and I couldn't speak before Johnnie."

"Johnnie isn't here now."

Mrs. Farrell laid down her work, and leant her elbow on the table, shading her eyes with her hand. Her heart beat very quickly. She was afraid of her mother.

"Dr. Symes began telling me something the other evening," she said. "We were interrupted. I did not see him again, and I hardly understood what he was alluding to. I had a letter from him to-day."

"Well, well, go on," cried Mrs. Murray, as Cecilia paused.

"It was a very kind letter; he—he asked me to marry him."

Mrs. Murray surged up out of her chair, and precipitated herself upon her daughter; oversetting the work-basket in her haste, scattering wax, tape, and scissors, and sending cotton-reels spinning over the floor.

"Oh, my child, my child!" she cried. "Thank God, my prayers are answered. I shall see you rich, well cared for, successful, after all! Dear, good, excellent man! Never mind if he is not of very good family. At your age, Cecilia, a marriage of reason is what we must look to. Comfort, my dear, wealth, absolute wealth, and a very good position. Johnnie's future secured. You have written; you have answered him?"

Mrs. Farrell released herself gently from her mother's embrace. She had grown very pale, and trembled as she replied :—

"Yes, I wrote this morning. I posted the letter myself."

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Murray, devoutly, again. "Faith, Cecilia—faith is a great power. Believe and labour—as I have; spare no pains, keep the end in view—the reward is sure. That's a very nice house indeed in Brummell Square; plenty of room for us all, with a little management. Did he make any statement about settlements? We must go carefully into all that, you know. Mrs. Latimer tells me his income is large, really large. Ah, well—how short-sighted we are! That business with Colonel Enderby was a disappointment to me last spring, I don't deny. But Providence watches over the widow and the orphan. Here you might have been at this moment, if all one hears is true, with him on your hands, dying: instead of which, my dear, a prospect, an excellent, respectable, dignified prospect is before you! As I say, never mind about family; we can't have everything. You'll bring your husband family, you know. It is better those things should be divided, I think; it——"

"Stop, stop, mother!" cried Cecilia Farrell, hoarsely.

She stood up.

"You have misunderstood me."

"Hey—what's this?" exclaimed the elder lady, with a rapid change of manner. "Don't stand there looking like a mad woman. If you're going into hysterics, say so, and I'll get a jug of water. Cecilia, I'm ashamed of you! For goodness' sake, be sensible!"

Nevertheless there was something in her daughter's appearance which distinctly alarmed Mrs. Murray. She seized her by the arm, and shook it with a sudden violence.

"There, there, speak, can't you? Speak, and don't be a fool, Cecilia!"

"Oh, mother, forgive me! Pray don't be angry with me. Perhaps it is selfish; but I can't marry him."

Mrs. Murray looked a very unpleasant old woman as she answered. She leant forward, and peered into Cecilia's pale agitated face, as though she would have liked actually to torture the truth out of her.

"Don't dare to tell me you have refused him?"

Cecilia bowed her head in assent. There was a silence of some few minutes, and then Mrs. Murray spoke in a terrible voice.

"You are a base, ungrateful woman; you are a bad mother and a bad daughter! I have borne with your stupidity and awkwardness, your mulish obstinacy, all these years. I have spent my money and time and affection upon you, and this is the return

I get. Do you want to kill me? Do you want to ruin us?—Look here, Cecilia, you have got to give way, to change your mind. You say you have written. Well, I am going to write too. I am going to explain and apologize. I am going to say that you were taken by surprise; that your reply was ill-considered; that you regret it. I'll apologize; I'll do anything, say anything, but let that letter stand. Do you hear?"

Mrs. Murray had often had cause to lament her daughter's lamentable want of spirit; at this juncture her daughter's spirit fairly confounded her.

"You may spare both yourself and me that humiliation, mother," said Cecilia, quietly. "I have given Dr. Symes a reason for my refusal which renders any renewal of his offer impossible."

"What reason?"

"That I cannot tell you."

She was still trembling, but no longer with fear. A strange excitement had taken possession of Mrs. Farrell. She held herself almost proudly.

"Cecilia," cried Mrs. Murray, in a sort of amazement, "do you intend to defy me?"

"Yes; I am afraid I do intend to defy you, in a way," she answered. "There are claims on me, mother, which stand even before yours and Johnnie's. I must keep my own self-respect. I will not sell myself for any one's money. I am sorry that Johnnie should miss the chance of advantages that he might have had; and that you should be deprived of ease and comfort which you would have enjoyed—but I can't help it. I cannot sell myself. My life was spoilt years ago, by breaking off a marriage in obedience to your wishes, mother; it shall not be spoilt a second time, by making one to satisfy them. We are poor; we must go on being so. We are obscure; well, I am perfectly willing to be obscure still. Johnnie will have to make his own way in the world; he must do it then. Haven't I some rights as well as other people? This right, at all events, to refuse absolutely to degrade myself for the good of my family? All my life I have loved one man," cried Cecilia, while her thin cheeks flamed and her eyes were bright with sudden enthusiasm. "I am nothing to him—nothing in the world. If he sees me, it is with embarrassment, perhaps even with dislike. It does not matter. God forbid he should ever think of me in any other way. I am not jealous of his wife; I only want him to be happy—happy his own way, with her, not with me. But I can't marry, mother; I will never marry. I have had enough of that. Give up all idea

of it. You have called me obstinate—on this point I am obstinate. You had better leave me alone."

Cecilia, still brave, still defiant, knelt down on the floor, and began gathering the scattered contents of the overturned work-basket together. Almost for the first time she had let herself go: and, for the moment, her revolt filled her with a really magnificent sense of freedom, of indifference, of superiority to circumstance or criticism. She could have set any number of gussets, and set them with faultless stitches, at that moment.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Murray had slunk back into her chair again, in an extraordinary state of perturbation. Balaam's sensations when reproached by the ass must have been mild compared with those experienced by our friend Mrs. Murray, when her daughter turned upon her in this very unexpected manner. She was quite unnerved. Genuine tears began to make their way down over her rouged and powdered cheeks; her shrewdness and diplomacy deserted her. She was a miserable sight, as she sat there crying, shaking her poor, worldly, old head—with its cap all awry—and harsh-coloured hair puffed out with such youthful archness over the ears, her hard grasping face puckered up and wrinkled, and the red in her carefully organized complexion coming out in all the wrong places.

"Oh, I am a wretched, deserted, unhappy old woman," she muttered. "It's a cruel world; everybody turns against you, at last. You do your best for your children, and then they throw it in your teeth, and tell you you've spoilt their happiness for them. Thirty, forty, fifty years you toil and moil and fight for them; and give them all the chances that you can get hold of; and push them on; and try to make a position and keep up appearances;—and then they reproach you. It's a hard, hard world; there's no help or mercy in it: and I'm a wretched, unsuccessful, deserted old woman."

Cecilia rose from her knees, came over, and stood by her chair.

"Mother," she said gently, "I know you have had a bitter disappointment; but there is something better worth living for and thinking about than mere wealth and position and getting on, you know. It is not my place to remind you of this. You must forgive me; but I should be so glad to comfort you, and I can't promise you those things."

Cecilia paused; trying, in her dumb, groping way, to find adequate expression for the thought that was in her.

"Can't we forget the world's opinion—it has brought us little beyond worry and annoyance—and think of better and more

lasting things?—of religion? I don't mean merely going to church and using certain recognized phrases; but religion of the heart;—a real giving up of our will to God's; a real submission to His ordering; a real faith and trust, and hope—not for reward here in the way of money or advantages; but of reward of a purer kind, hereafter. And that not on account of our own merits, but of His great mercy, who gives us far more than we deserve.—I am preaching to myself, mother, just as much as to you. I am very faithless and dull. It is so difficult to keep on every day striving with one's own weak, sinful nature. Work with me, mother; help and strengthen me. I stand greatly in need of both."

An impatient smile broke through Mrs. Murray's still falling tears.

"I believe you are sincere, Cecilia. You are a good woman," she said: "but I never met a good woman yet who didn't drivel at times, as you are drivelling now. I have my intellects still, I am thankful to say, and there are some things I see very much more clearly than you do. Do you suppose if one has lived for this world till one is seventy, one can turn round all of a sudden, at seventy-one, and live for the other, and find great consolation in doing it? Changes are not so easily made as that. It is ingrained, my dear, by now. And then, after all, who has any right to blame me? I have only wanted what hundreds of people are born to, and take just as a matter of course, as they do the air or daylight, without any worrying or scheming. I couldn't afford to be philanthropic or religious before, and it's rather late to begin now.—You say the Lord is exceeding merciful. Well, then, perhaps He will make allowances for a woman with a small jointure and a large family of plainish daughters. I don't know.—Ring, will you, my dear, and tell Eliza to put a couple of table-spoonfuls of brandy in my gruel to-night."

How far the signing of this declaration of independence by Cecilia Farrell brought her permanent relief, I cannot say. That it increased her mother's respect for her, and caused the latter to leave her alone in the future, in questions matrimonial, is more than probable. But I am inclined to imagine that a lady of Mrs. Murray's temperament, if she abstained from one form of tyranny, would be disposed to balance abstinence in one direction by excess in another. To her self-devotion, and the poor return made to her by her ungrateful children, she did very frequently refer, both in public and private. Perhaps her words did not carry any deep conviction to the majority—in any case, we will hope so.

Dr. Symes consoled himself with his profession, and egg-shell

china. Sometimes, even, in that snug room of his, after dinner, when his reading-lamp was lighted, and the fire crackled pleasantly on the hearth, and some interesting new scientific treatise lay open before him, the doctor caught himself speculating as to whether—in the Palace of Truth—he might not congratulate himself on having had an exceedingly lucky escape.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER ALL, A REGRET.

BERTIE AMES and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay were coming up the carriage-drive towards the little red villa. They had been into Genoa. Eleanor sauntered along slowly; she was a little fatigued. In theory, she greatly admired tramcars as a levelling and democratic institution; but in practice, the noise, crowding, smell of Italian gin, and general tendency toward expectoration endured in these vehicles, gave her a headache, and sorely tried her slightly fastidious taste. It was a good step from the iron gates to the villa, too; and though there was a bracing crispness in the air, the February sunshine was hot and dazzling. The row of crooked fir trees threw blue, sharp-edged shadows along the roadway. The waste spaces of rough grass on either side were starred with the flowers of the anemone of the Apennines—white, scarlet, blue, lilac, blush pink, and violet—an almost endless variety of delicate shades of colour. In her hands, along with her parasol, Eleanor carried a big bunch of Roman hyacinths and camellias, bought at a picturesque flower-stall in the angle of a great, stately palace in the Via Nuova. The spring had come; not the pale, tentative, pensive spring of our northern climate, but the keen, brilliant, daring spring of the south.

Eleanor sauntered on silently up the road, Bertie Ames beside her. To tell the truth, he was not thinking very much about his companion just then. He was engaged with his own reflections, and entertained himself by humming a few bars from the opening scene of "Faust," *sotto voce*, as he moved lightly yet lazily along.

At the turn of the road, Eleanor sat down on a sloping slab of rock; she wanted to rest a minute, and it was pleasant here, after the noise and dust of the tram. Across the road, in front of her, a great fig tree—whose twisted roots clung round the broken rock in among which it grew in many serpentine folds and convolutions,—spread a pale, grey network of smooth, gleaming branches, knobbed with the already formed fruit, against the distant masses of deep wood and steep purple hill.

Bertie crossed the road, leaned his elbows on the natural wall of rock, just below the big fig tree, and gazed away over the brown vineyards and the town, showing sharp and clear in the sunlight, to the far-off curving coast-line, and the glittering snow-mountains in the west.

His back was towards her. Eleanor felt a wee bit neglected, somehow. It made her think.

Nearly a month had passed since their engagement. It had been a pleasant month on the whole. Bertie was affectionate, attentive: and even when he laughed at her, which he did pretty frequently, there was an underlying tenderness in his manner, which made it impossible for her to resent his sarcasms very warmly. Bertie's conduct had been entirely unexceptionable: and yet she was not quite satisfied. This engagement had not brought her all that she had expected of it. There was a faint flavour of disappointment in her mind after all. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was one of those ardent and generous persons who are liable to make an exaggerated estimate of the possibilities of human bliss; and are slow to learn that nothing in the world will bring them all that they ask for—that, to the end, the vision and the hope are fairer than the realization ever can be. She did not seem to advance in her relation to Bertie, or to get any nearer to him. There was nothing to quarrel with in his manner or bearing towards her: yet she was conscious of a wall of separation between them. Whether the defect of sympathy lay in herself or in her lover she could not tell. Perhaps marriage would set it all right; but marriage seemed still to hang in the offing, so to speak. Bertie had made no further definite proposals. He was very indolent; he was willing enough always to let things be, if the said things were fairly comfortable.

Eleanor sat staring at the pale branches of the fig tree and the purple depth beyond, and thinking of all this;—thinking, too, of the strangely different way of life she had proposed to herself; of her friend the priest, and the splendid ideal he had set before her. Suddenly the sweet pathetic tones of Bertie's tenor sounded in her ears. He was singing softly to himself that lament for lost youth, and love, and beauty, with which the drama of Faust's fate and passion commences.

To Eleanor, it carried too much meaning. She rose hastily, crossed the road, and touched the young man on the shoulder.

"Ah! Cousin Nell," he exclaimed, turning to her with rather a forced smile, and air of self-recollection: "I find my voice in the spring, you see, as the small birds do: or, rather, as the small birds would do, if they had not all been killed or caged, long ago,

by those villainous bird-catchers. The performance was not altogether pretty, was it? You did well to stop me."

Something in Bertie's speech—perhaps it was that word cousin—jarred painfully on his hearer. She took her hand off his shoulder, and drew a step away.

Bertie had turned round. He leant his back against the wall of rock and looked quietly at her. His eyes had still, at moments, that odd likeness to Malvolio's which had formerly so disturbed Jessie Enderby.

Eleanor looked back at him. There was a fine sincerity in her steady gaze.

"The last few weeks, since you came back, have been very happy ones to me, Bertie," she said, in a low voice. "I have had a great deal of pleasure in them, such as I had never expected to have again; and I suppose that has made me selfish. I have let one day slip away after another, and have neglected to think of anybody but myself and you. We have done nothing practical yet about Philip Enderby."

"No; quite true," replied Mr. Ames: "we have done nothing practical yet about Colonel Enderby. It is odd you should mention him just now, because I happened to be thinking about him. I had arrived at the conclusion to let well or ill—whichever it is—alone, and trouble myself no more about Colonel Enderby or his wife either."

The sun struck curiously hot on Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's head. She tried to put up her parasol. But the lace round the edge of it caught in the points of the ribs; and it was some little time before she could adjust it quite to her liking.

"I am afraid I must ask you to trouble yourself a good deal about Colonel Enderby and his wife, all the same," she said. "I am more anxious about them than ever. I had just arrived at a conclusion, too:—namely, that I shall not be able to rest till you have seen Jessie. For your and my sake, just as much as for theirs, it seems to me imperatively necessary."

Bertie Ames shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear creature," he said, "why will you always ask highly embarrassing things of me? Please remember, I am not in the least given to knight-errantry. I don't feel called upon to succour wounded heroes, or rescued distressed damsels. It is not the least in my line. I should make a horrible boggle over it. I am not a professional fine-fellow of the eleventh or twelfth century, you know; but an amateur of the latter end of the nineteenth, with a deep respect for my neighbour's small eccentricities, and a mortal dread of putting myself in a ridiculous position."

"Ah!" she cried a trifle impatiently; "that is all beside the point, Bertie. There is no knight-errantry in the matter. It is a question of humanity, of good feeling. You have a power which may be employed for the benefit of a man whom you respect, and a woman, who—who——"

Eleanor paused. It went against her pride to state her deepest thought in words.

"A woman," she added gently, after a moment, "whom you have—loved. Think of them, Bertie; and not of whether you may be putting yourself to some small inconvenience or not. Pray, pray, do as I ask you to. It has been culpably self-indulgent in me not to urge this on you sooner. I know it is right; I know it is for the best."

Mr. Ames was acutely uncomfortable, as he looked down at the shining gravel. He did not see how he could extricate himself from his present difficulty without behaving rather cruelly to the woman he had asked to be his wife—the woman whom he admired and liked most cordially; whose society he found stimulating and agreeable in a very high degree. Yet he felt it incumbent upon him to speak out, and let her know the danger in which he stood.

"Really, Nell," he said, "at times you develop the most remarkable power of getting one into a corner, and making one stand and deliver. Listen, and I will expound to you. Love, rightly considered, is a state of mind. Being in that state of mind, I apprehend it is eminently desirable to remain in close vicinity to the person who produced it; lest, not having a legitimate object on which to expend its energies, the state of mind should begin expending them upon some illegitimate one. I have had more than enough of coveting my neighbour's wife, Heaven knows! and am very fully convinced of the futility of that species of amusement;—but I am not absolutely fireproof, all the same. I do not relish the prospect of undertaking this mission unsupported, you know. Forgive my putting it all so plainly before you, Eleanor. Marry me at once, and then we will go to England together, if you like."

As he ceased speaking, the young man looked up. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's eyes were full of a warm light, her cheeks flushed with a dark rich bloom, her mouth was a little open, as if in eager readiness to speak. She was young, vivid, beautiful.

"Ah, you are delicious!" he cried, half laughing. "You women are absurdly enchanting."

Eleanor turned away and walked on hurriedly up the road. She was in a tempest of feeling; it was impossible to answer him moderately just then.

Bertie Ames lingered a moment or two. He threw back his head, flung up his arms, and then let them drop at his sides again. He hardly knew, perhaps, exactly what he meant by the action, beyond a sense that it was a general good-bye to a good many things he had cared for. Then he walked rapidly up the hot, glaring road after his cousin.

"Nell," he said, when he overtook her, "I have bungled atrociously, and offended you. Please forgive me."

Eleanor did not turn her head.

"Do you really care the least about my forgiveness?" she asked.

"Immensely," he answered. "It is everything to me."

"Then go to England."

She stopped, and looked at him somewhat proudly.

"I want no half-hearted affection, Bertie. I can give you my whole heart, my whole life—and I am not prepared to receive a fraction in return for them. Go and see Jessie; go and do what you can for Colonel Enderby; and then come back to me if you want to. Remember, you are still perfectly free. I have told nobody of our engagement. I abstained from doing so on purpose. If you do not care to come back, you can stay away with impunity. You are not in any way compromised."

"Do you take me for a scoundrel or an idiot?" he cried. "Of course I shall come back again. But the conditions are rather hard, Eleanor; and I have a feeling against this journey. It will bring bad luck to somebody."

"If the bad luck is there, it will come whether you go or not. You do not speak with your usual good sense," she answered.

She moved on up the ascent.

"Will you go?" she asked.

They had just reached the ending of the road, and came on to the open space of the terrace in front of the villa. The monkey, who had been sunning himself on the wall, seeing them approaching, scrambled down and ran across on all fours to meet his master, with strange chuckling cries of pleasure and welcome. Bertie picked the ugly, little creature up and fondled it as he spoke.

"Yes, I will go by the mail train to-night. I shall just have time to pack and eat my dinner."

"Ah, to-night! That is very soon," exclaimed Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, somewhat aghast.

"You have forced it on me, Cousin Nell. I would rather get it over and done with. But I warn you it will turn out badly."

He looked down at the monkey, and gently patted its wrinkled forehead.

"The devil, Malvolio," he said, "the very devil."

There was a silence. Eleanor stood with her head raised, looking away over the expanse of purple sea. Bertie could see the pure outline of her profile. It struck him that she looked very handsome, very intense, very sad.

"You will be rather lonely here, Nell, I am afraid," he remarked abruptly.

"I shall not remain here, in any case," she replied. "I have given my landlord a month's notice. The little red villa has become a hateful place to me. It is full of ghosts. Every room is haunted by tormenting memories; every chair and table reminds me mockingly of scenes in which my weakness, mistakes, ill-founded hopes, endless vacillations play a part. The curtains rustle with laughter at my follies. Faces look out of the mirrors over my shoulder, and taunt me with the remembrance of broken ideals and trusts betrayed. If we meet again, Bertie, we will meet somewhere else, not here."

She spoke with a ring of feeling which was very penetrating.

Mr. Ames stroked the monkey meditatively.

"Poor little red villa! It is tabooed, then?" he said. "Well, it has seen its share of the human comedy in the last two years, if it never saw it before—which, all things considered, is improbable. I could imagine the house would take a long sleep when your litttle *ménage* vacates it, Nell—willingly take a rest, and try to recover its tone before it suffers violence from another incursion of us poor puppets of circumstance. Meanwhile, I own I shall be just as well satisfied to think of you in rather more lively surroundings. The influences here, no doubt, have become peculiar: you will be safer away from them. But don't start any new idea, Eleanor, please, till you have seen me again. Don't let any high-flown, sentimental hankerings after contracting a matrimonial alliance with the Church, for instance, take possession of you. That I most definitely and fundamentally object to."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay shook her head with a sigh.

"You needn't be afraid, Bertie. That dream is past and over, alas! like so many more. Come in; you have not too much time, and we will eat our dinner in peace before we part. It is the last meal we shall eat together here; perhaps the last we shall ever eat together at all."

Bertie pushed the monkey up on to his shoulder. It sat there with its knees up to its nose, and with one long, skinny, brown hand clutching tightly at the collar of his coat. The young man came close to his cousin, and put his arm round her waist.

"Come, come, my dear Nell," he said, smiling, "don't let us

make such a tremendous tragedy of it. You play the part of a haughty and exacting princess in ancient legend, and set your lover dangerous tasks to perform before you will listen to him. Well, here the lover is going. He obeys you—perhaps, against his better judgment—but then, that should only give an extra savour of sweetness to his obedience. You have your way. What more, in the name of reason, do you want?"

"Something I shall never get, I fancy, Bertie," she answered; and her lips quivered a little as she spoke.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE DOMESTIC FOWL PLAYS A PART.

HAS it ever happened to you, reader, in some idle half-hour of a summer's morning, to stand and watch the manners and customs of a respectable, middle-aged hen, with a brood of young chickens?—to observe the care, the anxious consideration with which she treats her soft, callow, peeping family; the energy with which she scratches in nice dry earthy places against the corner of a stack of bavins, or the rich, prolific borders of the manure-heap, or among the rank grass round the water-bucket, to find them succulent or stimulating morsels? Have you heard the agitated cluckings with which she calls any chick of too adventurous or wandering a spirit; or answers the cries of one who, standing on tiptoe, with distended beak and elongated neck, announces in shrill and plaintive tones its inability to find its way back to the protecting stuffiness of the maternal wing? Does not this excellent fowl seem to you a very embodiment of all the characteristic maternal virtues?

But, since the sun is warm, and the open doorway of the clean wood-shed is a pleasantly shady place to stand in, just watch the behaviour of this diligent bird a little longer. See, now, if a strange chicken—small, soft, and peeping as any one of her own brood—comes towards her, how her wings droop and her tail spreads into a great aggressive fan, while every separate feather stands out fierce and bristling!—how her hard curved beak is darted down at the unhappy, shrieking, fluttering intruder; and how, unless the human spectator comes to the rescue, the poor, little wretch is shaken, pecked, maltreated till the tiny life is nearly or quite frightened out of its quivering body. Is this a true embodiment of maternal character too? It would be invidious to pronounce on such a point. I leave it to you, reader.

Jessie Enderby's husband had forgiven her. And yet, because our actions have a prolonged force in them—like those vibrations of the air which continue a great while after the voice which produced them is again silent—our young lady found the little world in which she moved rather a different place to her ever after that ill-starred night at Bassett Darcy.

The story, both of the serious nature of Colonel Enderby's illness, and of his wife's apparent indifference to his condition, leaked out, of course, as such stories will: leaked out, too, clothed in the darkest of colours, and with a small army of exaggerations, misconstructions, ungraceful hints and suggestions following in its train. A good many persons did not scruple to register their conviction that Mrs. Enderby was a shameless, little flirt; and while they expressed pity for her husband, added that they themselves, in like case, would have behaved very differently. A man should know when to put down his foot. Not to know when to do so, is to write yourself down either an ass or a poltroon. Bertie Ames had told Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, long ago, that Jessie would never conduct herself in a way provocative of the censure of society; but then he had neither taken into account the possibilities of adverse circumstances, or the almost unlimited power of misreading evidence possessed by the average human being. Selfishness and heartlessness by no means disqualify their owner from making a good show in the world. It was by bringing against her a charge of which she was wholly guiltless, that local society, in its small way, judged pretty Jessie Enderby, and condemned her. I do not wish to excuse her, or too easily condone her evil-doings; but I must maintain, nevertheless, that she was convicted on entirely wrong grounds.

Some three weeks after the Bassett ball, she received one morning an urgent note from Mrs. Colvin, begging her, if it lay in her power, to pay the writer a visit early that same afternoon. The request surprised the girl. Late events had made the Colvin name somewhat unwelcome to her. But the day was bright; and it was a little dull at home—Jessie fancied there had been a slight falling off in the number and cordiality of her visitors just lately. Then, too, she really liked Mrs. Colvin, whose large, gentle, motherly presence gave her an agreeable sense of repose and security. She decided to go; though she also decided not to mention the matter to her husband. Philip had grown a trifle fussy and particular, she thought. Collisions were disagreeable; and our young lady objected supremely to that which is disagreeable.

Jessie had learnt to drive. And it was with a certain quickening of the pulse and exhilaration of the spirits, that she trotted

the handsome pair of carriage-horses along the high-road; swept them round the curve under the railway bridge, scattering dogs and children and lounging artisans—loafing about till their afternoon's work should begin—to right and left; and then sent them on up the wide, main street of the pretty little town. Light natures like our heroine's, meet with manifold consolations by the way. They can live on the surface; and the surface, at all events, can generally be kept fresh and smart and pleasant to the eye.

"Put the horses up at the Prince's, William," she said, standing for a moment on the clean pavement, and giving herself sundry little pats and smoothings to get the set of her clothes just right. "And meet me at Luckcock's Library at half-past four. Ask for the afternoon letters, please; and see if there is anything for Colonel Enderby at the station."

Mrs. Colvin received her guest very kindly. She held Jessie's hand in her soft, steady grasp a little longer even than courtesy positively demanded, and looked at her earnestly, with sweet, questioning, near-sighted grey eyes.

"It is kind of you to come to me at such short notice," she said.

Jessie smiled radiantly.

"It is fine; I had nothing to do; I was delighted," she answered.

Mrs. Colvin stood holding her guest's hand, and looking into her brilliant face with a sense of strangely conflicting feelings. She had an accusation to bring,—and that a painful one,—against this young creature. She did not approve of Jessie; and yet the girl's youthful beauty filled her with a yearning, wondering pity.

"I am afraid you have been in some anxiety about Colonel Enderby," she said. "I hope that your coming here this afternoon shows he is better."

"Oh, he is very much as usual," Jessie answered, still smiling. "He has an innocent mania about his farm, you know. The farm was to make our fortune. But he has been rather indolent both about the farm and the fortune, perhaps, recently. He has preferred the smoking-room or my society. To-day, however, the farming-mania appears to be in the ascendant again. He told me he was going out to look at the sheep. I like the sheep, too. They are very worthy, well-meaning animals; but there is a certain sameness about them; it is possible to see enough of them. I was very happy to come and see you instead."

A slight change came over the expression of Mrs. Colvin's fair, elderly face. Decidedly this was not one of her own simple good-hearted chickens. It belonged to a very different brood.

"I am glad you can give such a reassuring account of your husband," she said. "We feared, from rumours which have reached us, that he had been seriously ill on the night of the ball at Bassett."

The subject was hardly an agreeable one to Jessie Enderby; but her blood was still tingling with the healthy excitement of her rapid drive. Like some wild, woodland thing, she was sprightly and glad with the quickening breath of the coming spring. She answered lightly enough.

"Ah! every one is ill at times, I suppose; but it passes again. And when it is passed, is it not best to forget?"

Mrs. Colvin sighed.

"You are very young, Mrs. Enderby," she said. "Later, it is not possible to forget so easily. But come, sit down here. I have something I want to tell you."

"I hope it is something nice," observed Jessie, parenthetically, as she rustled across the room after her hostess, and seated herself by her.

Jessie had always appreciated Mrs. Colvin, who struck her as a well-bred, comfortable, soothing sort of person. But it is extraordinary what a fund of moral courage some of these large, soft, mild-looking mothers are endowed with.

These clinging, dependent women,—who lose their heads in a crowd, are utterly unnerved by the noise and rush of a railway station, faint at the sight of a wound, and shrink away in helpless disgust and terror before rough looks and coarse expressions,—will still, on occasion, when their affections are involved, manifest a daring disregard of conventionalities in speech and action, that would be a sheer impossibility to the bravest man.

Mrs. Colvin had resolved to lay certain—as she believed—truths before Mrs. Enderby: and the gentleness and tenderness of her nature seemed to harden into almost cruel courage. She ignored the girl's little remark, and began speaking in her slow, quiet, ladylike way, as though she was stating the most ordinary of commonplaces. It is one of the advantages of good breeding, that it gives to the possessor of it, an unabashable self-confidence, whose mild unconsciousness makes it only the more impressive.

"I have been troubled and disturbed lately," she said, "in a matter of very deep and vital importance to me. For the past week I have been alone, having persuaded my son to go away and stay at Pentstock with his sisters. He was unwilling to leave here, but he yielded to my very clearly expressed wishes. During that time I have thought a great deal of you, Mrs. Enderby. At last I resolved to ask you to come and see me."

Jessie sat with her head a little on one side, carefully unbuttoning and taking off her gloves. "My hands are just a little cramped with driving," she remarked by the way.

Mrs. Colvin looked at her again earnestly with her questioning grey eyes: but Jessie appeared absorbed in the removal of her gloves.

"I am afraid there is much undesirable gossip in Tullingworth," Mrs. Colvin went on. "It is always so, I suppose, in a watering-place. Every little event is instantly remarked and commented on. Certain things have been discussed lately which I think you ought to know of, Mrs. Enderby."

"Ah!" she answered, a trifle impatiently, "that sort of information—pardon my saying it—is not in the least interesting to me."

"If it was merely outside gossip, I should not trouble you with it, be sure," Mrs. Colvin continued: "but it is something which nearly concerns us both, your happiness and mine, and the happiness of those who are, or should be, very dear to us. My son——"

Jessie looked up suddenly.

"Your son—your son?" she cried. "What, then, is your son to me?"

"That is just what I want to know," said the other, quietly. "My boy is changed; he is moody and preoccupied; he no longer has any confidence in me. Some one has come between us, and has alienated him from me. I could wish no woman a worse punishment than to feel the agony of such a separation. He is too honourable to tell me who has worked this change in him. I do not go out much, you know, Mrs. Enderby; but on all hands the same name is hinted at. What must I think? I would rather my son was dead than that he should bring disgrace on himself and on his father's name; or that, through him, shame and dishonour should come to another household. I cannot believe that Charlie would have laid himself open to charges of this kind, unless very distinct encouragement had been offered him."

Ah, the poor motherless chick! do you not pity it amid all this setting-up of feathers, this pecking and clucking? I do, from my heart, though the chick is a wilful, wandering, naughty, little thing.

Jessie sat quite still, her eyes glittering with a hard light in them, her lips drawn back, showing her white even teeth.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded, in a clear voice.

"Mrs. Enderby, if you have come between me and my son, if you have played with him, I implore you, pause, think;—put

an end once and for all to this wretched, disgraceful flirtation. The first steps seem such a slight matter, so unimportant, so lightly taken; but think where they may lead to. Think of your——"

But she stopped with a gasp. Jessie's white hand flashed out in a movement of sudden, ungovernable fury, and struck her full on the mouth.

"It is all a wicked lie!" cried the girl, springing up, and standing fierce as a little tigress in front of her—"a wicked, execrable lie! Yes, I will say it. I don't care what I say. Why do you all hunt and persecute and accuse me? What bad minds you must have to think these things of me! Ah, why did I ever come to this wretched country, where everybody is as cruel as they are stupid? Tell your son he has bored me within an inch of my life fifty times over. He can dance, he can fetch and carry as well as another; he is not awkward. See, I give him his due, this precious young gentleman. But, *mon Dieu!* he is dull, dull, dull—dull as your everlastingly grey sky, your interminable fields; dull as your heavy brains, dull as your insolent thoughts of me.—I cannot stay. Do not speak. I will not hear you!"

Still animated by the violence of her anger, Jessie swept out of the room, down the staircase, and out into the street. A bitter, fierce defiance had taken possession of her, very different to her hour of terror at Bassett or to the sense of shame that had followed on Augusta Enderby's scolding of her, and made her take refuge in her husband's faithful love. Adversity, which braces strong, noble natures, as heavy hammer-strokes weld true metal to use and solidity, only mars and ruins slight, selfish, pleasure-needing beings like poor Jessie. They have no power of rising through detraction and injury into a fuller and richer spiritual life; no power of ripening and mellowing under the influence of searching mental experience. They lose their own peculiar charm; their careless spontaneity; the purposeless yet inspiring loveliness we so prized in them; and present us with no higher grace or virtue in place of it. It is poor work beating butterflies with a cart-rope.

Outwardly calm, but with a growing concentration of purpose, her pretty head held high, and her hands clasped tightly together, Jessie walked through the Tullingworth streets in the thin February sunshine. But her heart was black with hatred; with a sense of unjust outlawry; with a feeling that she was at war with every man and woman she met. She turned into the hotel.

"Tell my servant to bring round my carriage immediately," she said to a waiter standing in the hall. "I will go into the coffee-room and wait."

The man hurried on before her to throw open the door of the said rather gloomy apartment, with its substantial mahogany chairs and tables, its heavy red carpets and curtains, its array of time-tables, hotel lists, and daily papers.

Jessie crossed the room, and stood looking over the wire-netted blind of the window into the street, to catch the first sight of the carriage. She wanted to get home as quickly as might be. She had an announcement to make to her husband.

A gentleman, the only other occupant of the large room, was sitting stretched out lazily in an armchair by the fire. His face and the upper part of his person were completely hidden by the newspaper he was perusing. Jessie was far too deeply absorbed by her own reflections to pay any attention to her companion; and he, on his part, seemed at least equally indifferent to her presence.

The carriage did not come. The girl grew impatient. Perhaps William had not come back from executing the various commissions she had given him to do for her. She turned round, intending to ring the bell and send some one to make inquiries.

Just then the gentleman sitting by the fire crumpled his paper together, and rose to his feet with an irritable, little exclamation in Italian.

Jessie paused half-way across the room. There was a moment of profound silence.

Then she cried aloud:—"Oh, Bertie, Bertie!"

She came across hastily to him, her face suddenly irradiated with a lovely expression, half smiles, half tears. She laid both hands on the young man's arm, and put up her mouth, in sweet, impulsive, childlike fashion for a kiss.

Bertie had started violently on first seeing her. He went very pale. For a few seconds he hesitated. Then he took her hand in his, and bending down, kissed it, and not her lips.

"Dear little cousin," he said in his soft rich voice, "I was on my way to see you. I have come over on an embassy from Eleanor—from your step-mother. But I intended to present myself, armed with my credentials, with due etiquette and formality to your husband, first of all. This meeting is a trifle premature and disconcerting."

He managed to smile and speak in his usual drawling way; but it seemed to Bertie Ames that the life was going out of him in great throbs of pain. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had, indeed, given her lover a hard row to hoe.

BOOK SEVENTH.

THE FINAL REWARD.

CHAPTER I.

FOR THE SECOND TIME JESSIE ENDERBY SEES A GHOST.

"THEY'RE a rare lot 'er lambs, they are. I don't mind to 'a seen so many doubles since I wer' shepherding for old Mr. Jakeman, over at Wilby-le-Walls, a matter 'er twenty, may be twenty-five year ago, that was."

The above observations were delivered in the slow and measured cadence peculiar to the Midlandshire labourer, who having already passed middle age, has escaped the deteriorating influences of modern education, and still employs his native dialect with all its legitimate breadth of intonation. The speaker, Essex, with his moon face and short thick-made figure, clad in a long worn overcoat—lined for greater warmth with a material nearly resembling horse-clothing—and yellow leather gaiters, fitting in close wrinkles tightly round the ankle, thereby bringing the large proportions of his heavy, clay-stained boots into ungraceful prominence—stood in the listless, slouching attitude common to men of his class, contemplating the bleating lambs and the great, broad-backed sheep with an air of stolid complacency.

Colonel Enderby leant on the handle of his long spud and contemplated the lambs too.

There is still a very real satisfaction to be derived from the fact that most of your ewes bring doubles, even when you have reason to believe yourself within quite measurable distance of eternity. The day of small things is never quite done, thank God. Sugar is sweet to the mouth even of a dying man. And our friend the Colonel, on this still February afternoon, when the first touch of spring was in the air, and the blackbirds flirted in merry lover-like

fashion up and down the purple budding hedgerows, and the long tassels showed red on the black-stemmed alders overhanging the brook, was very pleasantly conscious, not of death, but of life—of reviving interest and quiet enjoyment in things around him.

It was a very good day with him. He had been round the farm, looking at the cows in the Home Close, and at the beasts in the lower meadows, and watching the men and great, gentle, massive-limbed cart-horses at work on the plough land, for the first time since that nasty turn he had had at Bassett, three weeks ago. During these three weeks he had suffered no violent return of pain; he had slowly mended. And Jessie, all the while, had been kind and sweet-tempered to him. She had been contented to stay more at home: and though she had made no direct allusions to his illness, Philip fancied she had tried to be thoughtful and considerate towards him. A little delicate flower of hope was beginning to blossom shyly and timidly in Colonel Enderby's breast. Ah, life is a good gift! Who among us, in his saner moments, would part from it willingly?

With an instinctive drawing towards what is young and has the promise of future fertility in it, he had picked a sprig of hazel, with its tiny point of crimson flower and green, drooping catkins, and stuck it into the button-hole of his brown shooting-coat. It was not a very effective form of personal decoration, perhaps—inferior, for instance, to Mr. Ames' habitual gardenia:—but to the Colonel it had a tender value, since it symbolized the spiritual blossom of hope that was unfolding within him.

At the same time, he was sensible of being a good deal tired with his walk. The sloping grass field, though he had crossed it very slowly, tried his breathing. Philip was quite willing to rest on the handle of his spud a little longer and listen to Essex:—who, it may be observed in passing, when engaged in conversation, always carefully stood at right angles to his auditor, presenting a large expanse of sallow cheek and rounded shoulder.

Sandy, the coarse-haired, bob-tailed sheep-dog, sat down on the damp meadow grass a few paces off; keeping a sharp, anxious eye on the flock all the while, as the lambs ran to and fro,—kicking and butting at each other, racing in excited, playful little companies wildly over the long smooth ridges, bucking up into the air with round backs and ungainly pendulous legs, and then rushing back again to demand sustenance, in the most open and unrestrained sort of fashion, from their serious, slow-moving mothers.

"That wer' the last time we had any luck to speak of, with that flock," the man went on. "Next year and the year follering

the lambs come fine enough; but they went wrong when they got up a few days old—seemed all to windle away, somehow."

"Seemed to windle away, did they?" repeated the Colonel. "I hope these little beggars won't take to doing anything of that sort. They look jolly enough now, anyhow."

"They're a rare lot 'er lambs, they are," replied Essex, meditatively. "Old Muster Jakeman, he come down to me when I was in among 'em, one Friday forenoon—Friday it was, or Saturday—happen it wer a Saturday, though it wer Friday, I think:—and he says to me, 'Essex,' 'e says, very short and off-handed like, 'what's up with these lambs?' 'e says. 'They're ac'shally pined,' 'e says. I spoke up to 'im, not holding with being blamed when I didn't deserve it. 'I tell you what it is, sir; I done my best by these lambs early and late,' I says, 'day in and day out; but they've got something wrong with their insides, sir, as is beyond your cunning nor mine either. I don't understan' it,' I says—no more I didn't; no more I don't to this mortal day. The ewes wer' right enough—but the lambs, they windled. Got just like so many little 'natomies. Law 'bless you, there weren't a bone in their carkisses you couldn't 'a put yer two fingers round afore they died."

Essex paused, exhausted with this flight of anecdotal eloquence.

"There, fetch 'em up, Sandy," he said.

The lean wise-faced dog sprang off like a yellow streak across the grass, turning and doubling, driving the fat, heavily fleeced ewes, and the bleating lambs—a compact palpitating dirty-white mass—into the farther corner of the wide meadow.

"I must be getting home again," said Colonel Enderby, almost regretfully.

He enjoyed the homely, country sights and sounds, and the pale glint of the early spring sunshine: enjoyed them all the more keenly at this time of returning activity, after that miserable episode—he tried to think of it as seldom as possible—at the ball at Bassett Darcy.

"Glad to see you about again, sir," observed Essex, half shamefacedly, as he moved away after Sandy and the flock. "I says to my missus, last night, I says, I seems to miss something when I don't see the Colonel round most days."

Philip Enderby was conscious of a heightened sense of pleasure. He was very grateful to any one, gentle or simple, for liking him. The flower of hope blossomed quite bravely as he walked on quietly across the field towards the gate opening on to the road, just opposite the Manor House, whose buff-coloured, stuccoed gables and great red chimney-stacks rose with such an air of

mellow old-fashioned comfort among the budding trees and evergreens.

Just as he passed out into the brown, moist roadway, he heard the roll of carriage-wheels, and the sharp trot of a pair of horses coming up behind him. The Colonel looked round; and then waited on the footpath.

Jessie drove by at a smart pace, sitting tall and straight on the high driving-seat of the phaeton, and handling both whip and reins in a very workman-like manner. The colour in her cheeks was clear and bright with the humid air and the movement; and her face had a pretty expression of decision upon it, under the sweeping lines of her large black hat.

Philip smiled at her with a certain tender pride as she rattled past him.

"That's right, put them along, Jessie," he called after her. "I say, look out for the gate-post, though. Why on earth can't a woman keep in the middle of the road, I wonder," he added to himself, "instead of shaving off corners in that crazy fashion?"

Jessie drove on up to the front door; gave her wraps and parcels—Jessie was one of those persons, by the way, who rarely came home without parcels—to Berrington, who came forward to help her with his usual stiff, sober demeanour; and then, getting down, walked back with quick steps to meet her husband.

"My dear child," said the Colonel; "do, for goodness' sake, be a *little* more careful at corners. You were within an ace of running into that right-hand gate-post just now, and then we should have had a pretty smash. Upon my word, I don't at all like your driving those horses with William sitting behind. An accident might happen half a dozen times over before he could get round to help you."

"One's groom cannot sit by one's side," she answered with decision. "It looks—like that—all nohow. It is not at all *comme il faut*, I think."

"I'd fifty times rather a thing looked nohow—as you put it—than that you should run any risk of hurting yourself. It turned me perfectly sick to see you just now." Then feeling that he had spoken rather authoritatively, he added, "Come along in, and get your tea, and tell me how the world wags in Tullingworth."

Jessie stuck out the toe of one neat little boot from under the frills of her dark velvet skirt and stamped it on the gravel.

"My feet are frozen," she said. "I must take a turn to warm them. Come with me, Philip, round the garden."

Colonel Enderby would have preferred going into the house at once. He was tired; and a sense of fatigue was, he knew well, a

risky thing, being often the precursor of active physical distress. Then, too, he shrank from letting his wife see how slowly he found it necessary to walk, or how often he had to stand a minute and rest now.

"Oh, do come!" Jessie repeated, somewhat querulously.

She put her hand into his with a dainty gesture of compulsion. Her charming face was very close to his at the moment. Philip bent down and kissed the cool rounded cheek. Jessie's little tempers were wonderfully bewitching.

"Come along, then," he said, smiling at her. "You shall go for a prowl and warm your feet, if you want to."

The girl slipped her hand through his arm, and they passed round to the garden, and began pacing up and down the gravel path, between the old red brick wall and the tennis-ground. A light wind came damp and fresh over the stretches of grass-land, and the pale light grew fainter and fainter as the sun sank in the white glistening west. Jessie was silent. She seemed quiet and absent. Colonel Enderby, as he moved beside her, fell into a vaguely pleasant reverie, begotten of the stillness and tenderness of the spring evening.

"I met Bertie Ames this afternoon," said the girl abruptly, at last.

The Colonel stopped short, moved a step away from his wife, and stared at her in undisguised amazement.

"Bertie Ames!" he exclaimed—"Bertie Ames! Why, what the devil is he doing here?"

"You cannot be more astonished than I was," she answered. "He has kindly taken the trouble to come over to England to see us. Mamma, it appears, desired it. He left Terzia in a great hurry, and had not time to write. He intended coming out here to-morrow to call on you, after sending over to announce his arrival. I met him quite by accident. We had a long talk. Bertie said a number of remarkable things."

So far Jessie had spoken with a cold self-restraint very unusual to her. Now she came back to her husband's side, and took his arm again.

"Let us walk up and down, Philip," she said. "I must move about; my feet are cold, you know."

They recommenced pacing up and down. The Colonel was staggered by this surprising piece of information. The charm of the spring day had suddenly departed. He felt a terrible distrust of what might be coming.

"Bertie has changed in some ways," Jessie continued. "He said things I did not at all like. He has taken to giving admirable

advice; and it sounded a little ridiculous coming from him, somehow. I am not sure that it did not amount to being almost offensive."

Philip glanced at his wife sharply; but she was looking straight before her.

"Bertie is going to do an extraordinary thing. He is going to marry Mamma," she said.

The Colonel gave a quick sigh of relief. It seemed as though a weight had been lifted off him—a weight which had pressed on him, at moments, ever since his first meeting with Jessie, long ago. He felt very thankful.

"I am glad," he remarked, presently. "Though, all the same, it appears to me that Mr. Ames' good fortune is very much in excess of his deserts."

Jessie held up her head stiffly; her voice shook perceptibly as she spoke.

"I am not glad. I know Mamma is young still; but I do not like it. It is confusing and unnatural. Everything will be different now—the little red villa is spoilt to me, and I was very happy there, sometimes."

Colonel Enderby stifled the reply that rose instinctively to his lips; stifled, too, the movement of jealousy, which his wife's evident emotion provoked in him. He could afford to be generous. Mr. Ames was going to marry Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay—the Colonel was, indeed, truly glad.

But Jessie seemed to have an unconquerable fit of restlessness upon her.

"I must walk," she said again, after a minute or two.

She turned, and passing along the farther side of the tennis-ground, between it and the sunk fence, took another path, which leads up by a gentle slope ending in a flight of moss-grown stone steps, to a straight walk—beyond the trees and shrubberies—bounding the Manor House grounds on the east, and affording a pretty extensive view over the surrounding country.

The late conversation had given Philip a good deal to think about. He followed Jessie quickly and mechanically, without any thought of himself. At the top of the steps, however, he was very forcibly reminded of certain unpleasant facts by a loss of breath, and a sharp stabbing sensation in his throat. As he stood panting and trying to get his breath again, he glanced anxiously at his wife. But Jessie was preoccupied; she was not observing him.

She had crossed the walk, and leant back against the ivy-covered wall which divided it from the high-lying pastures beyond. The mellow brick-work and multitudinous ivy leaves formed a

finely toned background to her figure. A great web of semi-transparent cloud spread across the western sky, through which the low sun shone with a faint, colourless radiance. The pale light fell softly on the girl's rich dark dress and on her large hat, leaving her face in shadow, as she stood looking down. She clasped her hands tightly together with a strained nervous action.

"Philip," she said at last, in a hard voice; "it has come to this—we must leave here. I must have a change. You have always said you would do your best to make me happy. Keep your word—let us go away."

Colonel Enderby's expression darkened with something besides bodily suffering. He leant heavily on his spud, and answered with the carefulness and deliberation of one who finds speech difficult.

"I thought you liked your home, Jessie?"

"So I did, at first. But, as Bertie used to say—not the Bertie I saw to-day; he indulges in moral aphorisms worthy of a schoolgirl's album; but as Bertie used to say, in the old days, before his very surprising regeneration—one gets beyond everything in time. I have got beyond this place and the society of it. I have squeezed it dry"—she made a very expressive motion with her hands—"and there is nothing but the rind left. The people are stupid; but stupid!" she cried with an outburst of vehemence, looking up at her husband.

There was a steely brightness in her eyes, and her face was curiously set. Jessie looked older, she looked dangerous. Pride and disgust made it impossible to her to repeat the story of her interview with Mrs. Colvin; but the memory of it inspired her with a strange intensity of manner at this moment.

"The people here do not understand me," she went on; "they are beginning not to like me. I must have something fresh."

"Well, what do you want?" asked Philip, with the same carefulness of utterance. From physical causes he could only trust himself to say a few words at a time.

"It has not turned out a success here," she replied. "The last few months have been wretched; they have been a great disappointment to me. I want to go far away and forget it all."

"Practically, that is not an easy thing to do," said the Colonel. "It costs a lot of money to go away, at short notice: and as to money, we are in rather low water just now, I'm sorry to say."

"Oh, I have thought over all that. You can realize."

"Realize?" he repeated.

"Yes; make a clean sweep. The stock on the farm is worth a good deal; you said so yourself only the other day. There is

all our furniture; it is valuable. I only bought the most expensive things. There are the horses. I shall be sorry to part with them; but it would be too much trouble to take them with us; and we could get very good ones, I suppose, in Paris or Vienna."

Philip Enderby looked at the girl in utter bewilderment.

"Paris or Vienna!" he exclaimed. "My dear child, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Why, this, this!" she cried excitedly. "I want to go away to some great city, where life is full and tumultuous and stirring; where the action is rapid; where there is constant amusement; where there is not time to consider and to think; where there is plenty of sound in the air, and of light and glitter in the streets. Don't you feel the wearying stagnation of this miserable place? I have tried England; and England will not do for me. Let us make a clean sweep of everything, and cut ourselves adrift. You always say you love me, Philip; then give me what I ask for. Let us go."

A strange uncertain smile, that had very little of amusement in it, came across the Colonel's face. He turned and looked into the pale misty sunset; and—he could not help it—his eyes filled with tears. He had settled down in this quiet home with such a gracious sense of content and well-being. The wide, green, pastoral country, with its yearly round of simple natural occupations and interests, had satisfied some of his strongest and most wholesome instincts. The late granted satisfaction of his affections in love and marriage, and his subsequent return to the scenes and associations of his youth, had rounded life for Philip, and given him a second spring-time such as seldom falls to the lot of a man who has set foot on the barren table-land of middle age. Even during the last few months, while the shadow of sickness and anxiety had covered him, the farm and garden, the woods and fields, the twitter of birds in the grey mornings, the thousand changes of cloud and sunshine, calm and storm, had soothed, and fortified, and helped him very really. To give up all this for a wilderness of brick and mortar; for the bold careless splendour and equally bold and careless shame of a great city, struck him as almost too bitter a sacrifice. To go away and leave all that was so dear to him—beloved with the intimate and vital affection which is bred in the very bone and blood—to go away and die in a strange land! Jessie's proposition was preposterous: it would have been almost comic in its glaring incongruity, if there had not appeared to be an alarming completeness in her conception of it.

Philip was weak and tired; he was not equal to arguing with his wife.

"I didn't expect this, you know, Jessie," he said slowly. "It has taken me by surprise: and I am not very quick, I'm afraid, at getting hold of a new idea."

"Our reasons for coming here were two," she rejoined, with a certain finality in her tone. "You wanted to be near Bassett, and you wanted to hunt. I most distinctly have no intention of going near Bassett again, after Augusta's behaviour to me; and it seems that you have quite given up hunting—so there is no valid reason why we should remain."

"Ah, those were our only two reasons for coming here, were they?" said Philip, with the same hopeless kind of smile. "I had fancied there was more in it than merely that. However, no doubt you know best, my dear. I think we'd better go in. The mist is beginning to rise; you may catch cold."

Jessie moved to the head of the steps. As she passed him she gave her husband an odd furtive look.

"There are cleverer doctors in Paris and Vienna than there are here," she said, in a low voice. "Perhaps, for your own sake, Philip, you had better go."

"Be honest, Jessie, be honest," cried the Colonel, with a movement of keen distress and anger. "For love I would do anything for you, God knows; but you can't buy me."

The girl made no answer. She went on swiftly down the path: and it was not till she nearly reached the house that she turned and looked back at her husband.

He was a long way behind, standing still, right in the middle of the walk. Jessie was seized with sudden dread. She called to him. At first he did not answer. She waited a minute; then her own fear made her go a few steps towards him. She called again.

"Why do you stand there? Why don't you come in, Philip?"

The Colonel motioned her away with a passionate gesture.

"Go indoors," he said hoarsely; "go indoors, Jessie. Never mind me. Go in. I'll come on presently."

She paused for a moment—listening—watching him intently. Then she went on hurriedly round the corner of the house.

Dr. Mortimer Symes stayed at the Manor House till late that night. Berrington, as he helped him on with his overcoat in the hall, when at last he was leaving, ventured on a remark.

"This was a worse attack than the other, sir," he said.

"Colonel Enderby has been desperately ill to-night," Dr. Symes answered seriously.

Berrington passed his hand scientifically about the crown of the doctor's hat before presenting it to him.

"Will the Colonel get round, sir?" he asked.

Dr. Symes shook his head.

"I greatly fear not. If he could be spared all anxiety and agitation, his life would be prolonged, probably. But the mischief is grave, and it is of a nature which leaves no hope of actual recovery. He has complained of pain in the throat to-day; that is a new symptom, and a very alarming one, I regret to say."

Dr. Symes took his hat.

"You have my instructions?" he added. "I shall come over again to-morrow morning."

Berrington assented. When the doctor had finally departed, he went back quietly to the smoking-room.

Colonel Enderby sat in an easy-chair by the fire. He leant forward, with his elbows resting on his knees, in a nerveless attitude. His eyes were closed; his face was drawn; he looked fearfully exhausted. As the servant came in, he opened his eyes and raised himself, with a perceptible effort.

"I'm better," he said. "I believe I can get upstairs, Berrington, if I take my time about it, and you help me. It must be late, and I don't want to keep Mrs. Enderby up."

Berrington stooped down and began gathering some newspapers together that had fallen on the floor.

"Mrs. Enderby sent down to ask how you were about half an hour ago, sir. She sent word that she didn't wish to be disturbed again. She gave orders that the north bedroom was to be got ready for you."

The newspapers rustled as Berrington smoothed and folded them, and laid them on the lower shelf of the what-not, against the wall. He put the fire together with a few skilful touches, occupying himself with unobtrusive employment till his master should give some further order. At last he had performed all the small offices that presented themselves; then he stood waiting in respectful silence.

Philip Enderby looked up at his old servant and spoke. His manner was calm; but his eyes were those of a man utterly broken-hearted and despairing.

"You can go, Berrington," he said. "There's nothing more you can do for me. I'll stay down here for the present."

Discipline is stronger even than sympathy. Berrington noiselessly opened the door, and went out into the dimly lighted anteroom. Then he could not contain himself any longer. No one was within hearing, and he spoke his mind.

"Damn that woman!" he said aloud. "It was the ugliest day of the poor Colonel's life when he first set eyes on her—the little jade!"

As for Philip Enderby, he sat quite still, leaning his head on his hands. Some agonies are dumb. They cannot translate themselves into articulate speech, or even into articulate thought. But the last act of the tragedy had come. Jessie had given her husband his dismissal: and—God help him—he knew it.

CHAPTER II.

THE COLONEL IS TEMPTED TO THROW DOWN THE CARDS.

THE smoking-room at the Manor House struck Dr. Symes as a peculiarly cosy and cheerful apartment, when he entered it next morning. The large sash-window looks out due south over the tennis-ground and garden; and at this hour the sunshine slanted in at it, lighting up a quaint series of old coloured sporting prints that adorned the wall opposite the fireplace, and illuminating a chalk drawing of Jessie Enderby hanging over the writing-table. The drawing in question was a very clever one. In it the artist had succeeded in giving that subtle suggestion of individual character which has since gone far to secure him a conspicuous place among our modern portrait painters. Fred Wharton had caught and rendered admirably the irresponsible, sportive, puck-like quality of Jessie's beauty.

A large dark bookcase, containing a library very symptomatic of its owner's tastes, filled up the further end of the low room. Over the chimney-piece was a high wooden rack fastened against the wall; on which rested a couple of fly-rods—done up in neat grey waterproof cases; a rifle and a double-barrel shot-gun, exhibiting, under the careful hands of Berrington, the highest degree of polish wood and metal could be induced to take; some whips and spurs, and miscellaneous odds and ends of a sporting order; and in the place of honour, just over the mantelshelf, a sword—the steel scabbard of it giving off a keen, cold dazzle of light.

The morning was remarkably mild and fine. The window had been thrown wide open, and on the ledge, just outside, sat Jessie's fluffy black cat, daintily washing his face with his cushioned paws, his attention centred very completely upon his own sleek, well-favoured little person.

Colonel Enderby stood by the open window, his back to Dr. Symes, as that gentleman, with short halting steps, entered the room. The doctor was not easily taken off his guard; but he could hardly restrain an exclamation when his patient, turning round, came forward to greet him.

The Colonel was well-dressed, as usual, and had the same air of spotless freshness and cleanliness about him. Nevertheless, a singular alteration had taken place in his appearance. His thick hair and heavy moustache had been getting very grey for the last three months, it is true: but this morning they were blanched as white as snow. The effect was startling.—Perhaps it was the result of contrast. His eyes appeared vividly, almost preternaturally blue. They were sunk in his head, yet were very wide open, the upper lid being almost hidden under the curve of the eye-socket; while they had a distressing fixed stare in them, as of one who still sees, indeed, but to whom the object seen conveys little or no intelligible impression.

"A decided inclination to pressure on the brain. I feared something of the kind last night," thought Dr. Symes to himself. Outwardly he assumed an extra flavour of his habitual urbanity.

"I am glad to find you down already, my dear Colonel Enderby," he said, shaking hands with his patient. "I trust this is not merely another testimony to your remarkable fortitude, but a sign that you are really feeling better."

"Yes, I suppose I am better," replied the Colonel—"as much better as I can have any reasonable hope of being."

"You have a magnificent constitution," began the doctor, in a tone of encouragement.

Philip leant back against the embrasure of the window.

"Have I?" he said. "Well, I can't say that just now I am very glad to hear it. I feel uncommonly like a broken-down old cab-horse; broken-kneed and broken-winded—well between the shafts. The poor old beast remembers better times, Dr. Symes—cheery days long ago across country: and it's no very great consolation to him to learn that he and the cab are not likely soon to part company."

Philip put his hand out and began stroking the cat. But the creature got up, stretched with slow and dignified indifference, moved along the window-ledge just far enough to be out of reach, and then calmly reapplied its attention to the completion of its toilette.

Dr. Symes was silent. He perceived that his companion was not in a condition in which it would be of any advantage to attempt ordinary mild inanities in the way of comfort. It would be better to let Colonel Enderby have his say out. He was evidently labouring under acute excitement of some kind. If he gave vent to it in speech, it might be a relief to him. Dr. Symes waited.

Philip watched the cat for a few seconds. Then he turned again to the doctor.

"Well, every dog has his day, and I've had mine, I suppose. Ah! good God," he broke out suddenly, "if I could only be in the thick of it all once more—you can't think how it all comes back to me—hear the roar of the guns, and the shout of the men, and smell the powder; if I could fight!"—he set his teeth and looked across at the sword hanging against the wall yonder—"yes, fight just once more—at bottom I am the veriest savage—instead of sitting rotting here day after day, eating my heart out over trouble that can never be mended!"

He dashed his hand impatiently across his eyes.

"You must forgive a sick man's grumbling," he went on, more quietly. "When one ails like a woman, one takes to complaining like one, I suppose.—The old horse will keep on his legs as long as he can, after all, just from the old habit of going. And then some fair morning the poor brute will be too far gone to draw the cab any longer; then they'll put a halter on him and lead him away by the little back streets, so that people mayn't see him, to the knacker's."

Philip turned away and pressed his forehead against the cool glass of the window.

"That's how it ends," he said—"how it ends, ah me!—and the cruel thing is, that last morning is sometimes over-long in coming."

Dr. Symes was deeply moved; he could not trust himself to speak. He walked to the other end of the room, and stood looking at the backs of the books in the shelf. When he came back, Colonel Enderby had recovered his self-control.

"Pardon me," he said; "I believe I have been guilty of making a great fool of myself. I have had a bad night. I am not very steady this morning."

Mortimer Symes drew forward a chair, threw one leg across the other, and prepared to deliver a little oration.

"My duty, and I may add, my privilege, Colonel Enderby, is to postpone the advent of that last morning as long as possible. We all quarrel with life at moments, I suppose; but the quarrel, after all, is a transitory one. The deeper feeling, the instinct and impulse, of every healthy human being is in favour of life, not of death. To my mind this love of life, implanted so universally in our nature, is the dispensation of a wise and merciful Providence. It must be reverenced, and not outraged. As I said before, my dear sir, you have a magnificent constitution. In your case, with reasonable care, life may still yield you a measure of enjoyment

and satisfaction. It may be prolonged without becoming an intolerable burden either to yourself or those whom it is your first duty to consider. But a little common care and forethought are undeniably necessary. You have disregarded my injunctions, and overtaxed your strength in the most wanton manner. Yesterday, it appears to me, the attack was produced mainly by too long abstinence from food, and by over-fatigue."

Dr. Symes paused. His patient stood staring silently out of the window. The doctor began to fear his words had been pretty well wasted. He shifted his position, and added, with considerable emphasis—

"Your continued silence concerning your state of health has been, believe me, an almost culpable exaggeration of chivalrous sensibility. You must positively indulge in it no longer. We must institute a new *régime* altogether. I propose saying a few words to Mrs. Enderby myself before leaving here to-day."

Colonel Enderby faced round upon him quickly. The vague, fixed look passed away, and his expression grew perfectly definite. At the mention of his wife's name he regained his normal manner and bearing; and became once more the quiet, dignified gentleman whom Dr. Symes had, from the first, so warmly admired.

"Forgive me," he said; "but that will be unnecessary. I shall myself explain matters to Mrs. Enderby. All this, as you will readily understand, cannot fail to be very distressing to her. It is only right that she should hear of it from her husband."

"I understand perfectly," rejoined the doctor. "But, under existing circumstances, I strongly deprecate your undertaking an explanation which may lead to agitating conversation."

"That, unfortunately, is unavoidable," said Philip, simply.

Dr. Symes bowed. He was conscious of receiving a rebuff; but he bore Colonel Enderby no grudge for administering it to him. His dramatic sense was satisfied by the fact that his patient, even now under the heavy pressure of illness, held to his original determination, and so stoutly refused to own himself beaten. Constancy of purpose appeared to him as great as it is rare among the virtues. During the remainder of his visit he kept the conversation in strictly technical and professional channels.

And, in truth, Philip had not spoken without due consideration, actuated merely by a desire to shield Jessie, or by a passing feeling of the moment.

During the past night, sitting there alone, while the clocks struck hour after hour in the silent house, the Colonel had been terribly honest with himself. He had faced the situation; he had

realized the purport of it with appalling clearness; he had parted sternly with all illusion. The old necessity for straightforward practical action was strong in him still. He had got his marching orders, so to speak—well, then, he must obey them. There was no longer any place for doubt, for hope, for hesitation. He had ruined his career. He had thrown away his life for a thing that had played him false—for a thing that could hardly, indeed, be said to have any real existence at all outside his own imagination. He had been fatally deluded, he had fallen into a deplorable weakness and error. His great and noble love was wounded to the death, stricken, fainting, bleeding. He had no hope for it of recovery or returning. All he asked for it now was a still and silent death-bed, free from prying eyes and whispered comments, and the vulgar curiosity of idle persons: and, lastly, a reverent and decent burial—that it might lie in some quiet place, its brief glory and long sorrow alike blotted out and forgotten.

With no ingenious phrases, but in voiceless inarticulate fashion, he recognized and admitted the mysterious limitations of Jessie's nature—recognized that what went to make her inimitable personal charm went also to make her incapacity for looking at life from any but her own standpoint, that her fascination and her selfishness were, in fact, synonymous; saw that her purity took its rise in absence of human passion, just as her gaiety took its rise in some radical defect of human sympathy; saw, too, that her quick observation and practical ability were the result of a singular shallowness of feeling.

I do not mean to imply that Colonel Enderby treated his wife's temperament scientifically, and drew out a neat schedule of her peculiarities. It was in no cool, nice, progressive spirit of criticism that he arrived at these conclusions; but rather in the scorching lightning flash of a blinding conviction. He had fought against the truth—fought in gallant, reckless, chivalrous fashion. He had given her every chance. But fact is stronger than any man's will, or than any man's love either. It crushes down, down, down on us till denial is no longer possible. The beleaguered city is starved out. The struggle is over. It remains only for the famine-wasted garrison to make the best terms it may, subject to honour, with the conquerors.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH LOVE LOSES THE GAME, YET WINS THE RUBBER.

MR. AMES' premonition that his visit to England would be productive of bad luck to somebody, was not, as the event proved, unfounded. It went far to hasten a catastrophe. Jessie Enderby, her whole being in fierce revolt from the unjust accusations brought against her, had experienced a happy unreasoning revulsion of feeling at the first sight of her old comrade. Bertie was here; she was very fond of Bertie. The sky cleared suddenly. Everything would come right again somehow.

But the young man's words and manner, above all, the news of his engagement to her step-mother, had only plunged poor Jessie deeper into disappointment, gloom, and rebellion. He could do nothing for her, after all. He had merely come to read her lessons of submission and duty like the rest; and, unfortunately, such lessons only bored and enraged her. She had fallen back upon her husband. Philip was very good to her—kinder than any one. She would get him to take her far from her present vexations and miseries. The world is wide, somewhere she might still enjoy herself.—Then even Philip failed her. He was ill, and that disgusted and frightened her. She was furious, merciless, desperate.

Soon after Dr. Symes left him, the Colonel went in search of his brilliant young wife. He had not seen her since their parting the evening before in the garden. He had remained downstairs all night; and this morning, beyond an inquiry through the medium of Berrington, Jessie had given no sign. Philip shrank from sending for his wife, or even asking where she was. It seemed an indecent publishing of the alienation between them. He thought she might not have come down yet—Jessie was not famous for early rising—so he went through the anteroom and hall, up the polished oak staircase, the broad steps of which twinkled where the light took them, and along the landing to the door of her room.

It stood ajar. Philip knocked; and, as there was no immediate answer, he pushed it open.

The room was a small chaos of trunks and boxes. On the bed, piled up one over the other, were the contents of Jessie's wardrobes, her dresses, jackets, mantles—a rainbow of soft colours and rich, dainty fabrics;—the floor was strewn with charming

little boots and slippers and mysterious paper boxes;—the dressing-table was encumbered with half-packed jewellery and ornaments;—and about it all lingered that indescribable, permeating sweetness which seems to cling to certain women's garments, and is so singularly agreeable to the senses.

Kneeling before a big dress basket, sorting, arranging, packing, with rapid, skilful fingers, was Jessie's French maid—a plain, shrewd-eyed, well-dressed person, whose elaborate *coiffure* provoked at once the admiration and envy of her fellow-domestics. As the door opened she glanced up sharply; and, catching sight of the Colonel just behind her, gave a little scream.

"Ah! a thousand pardons, monsieur!" she cried, rising hastily to her feet. "I was startled for the moment, not knowing that monsieur was there."

Colonel Enderby looked round the room slowly, unable at first to take in what it might all mean.—"*Le pauvre cher homme*," as Sidonie said later to Berrington, "just then he was terrible. He had the face of a corpse and eyes of fire. During my life I cannot forget it."

At first his fears outstripped the truth; he thought Jessie was already gone.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked hoarsely.

"Madame went down some half-hour ago. No doubt monsieur will find her in the drawing-room."

The Colonel drew himself up, and looked very straight at the woman.

"Put all those things back in their proper places, do you hear?" he said. "Mrs. Enderby will not leave home at present."

"*Bien, monsieur*," returned Sidonie, with perfect sweetness and composure.

And she began to empty the dress basket again with great alacrity.

Jessie could not help being effective; it was as natural to her as her love of music or of dancing. When Colonel Enderby entered the drawing-room, he was presented with a little picture which to a man in a less cruelly serious frame of mind could not have failed to appear really delightful.

The coloured blinds were drawn partly down, and the sunshine came in through them, filling the pretty room with a warm diffused glow of light. Jessie was lying at full length on the low sofa set across one corner of the room. She wore a loose white cashmere morning gown, which fell in a dense, soft mass of drapery about her slight rounded figure, and formed an agreeable contrast to the dusky orange-red cover of the couch. A basket of half-torn letters

and papers stood on the floor beside her. She was very pale; there were dark circles round her closed eyes. The lustre seemed to have gone out of her beauty: yet it was great still. And there was a languor in her attitude which had in it something very appealing.

Even now, notwithstanding all that had come between them, in looking at his wife Colonel Enderby felt a great wave of tenderness pass over him.

"Jessie," he said quickly, "what's the matter? Are you ill?"

She turned her face to the wall, keeping her eyes closed, and seeming to shrink away from him.

"I have not slept. I have had a lot to do; I am tired."

"Poor child!" said Philip, gently.

And truly he pitied her—pitied her as one pities some creature of another race, which one craves to help and cannot. The bitterest drop in his cup of sorrow, perhaps, was the knowledge that vitally this lovely woman, whom he had loved so passionately, had always been infinitely far away from him in spirit and in heart. Except on the mere surface of life, they had never had any real ground of meeting.

He came on a few steps nearer to her. In doing so he suddenly caught sight of his own face in a mirror on the wall. The Colonel started, paused; and then moved back and sat down on a chair just behind the head of the sofa, where Jessie could not see him, unless she rose from her present recumbent position. He leant forward, resting his hands on his knees, holding his head up stiffly, and staring straight before him across the pretty room.

"Jessie," he began, in a low voice, "I have come here to speak to you. I want you to listen carefully to what I say. You needn't move or get up; just lie still if you're tired—I can talk to you best, perhaps, so. I am sorry to trouble you at all; but it is positively necessary we should come to an understanding. I'll say my say as shortly as I can."

The girl made no reply.

"You remember what you asked me yesterday? I promised to think it over. I was prepared, even though the cost was a heavy one, to do what I could to please you; but something has occurred since that settles the matter, I'm afraid. I am sorry on your account, Jessie—but I shall not be able to leave here."

Philip waited a moment. Jessie lay quite still.

"I am very ill," he went on slowly. "I'm sorry to distress you, but it is best to be plain, and for some time you must have guessed how things were going. I'm very ill. There can only be one end to it."

Jessie put up her hands and pressed them feverishly over her eyes.

"Don't tell me any more," she moaned; "oh, don't tell me! Am I not unhappy enough already? Have not I had enough to bear? Let me go without knowing."

Colonel Enderby's head sank lower. His face grew haggard with emotion.

"Ah, dear me!" he said; "but it has come to this, that I must tell you. I have been silent as long as I could be. God knows," he went on bitterly, "I would have died a hundred deaths rather than have confessed my love and asked you to marry me, if I could have foreseen such sorrow would have come on you through me. I believed myself to be stronger than most men this time last year. I did not come to you with the dregs of a worn-out constitution. I am innocent of any sacrificing of your young life to my own selfish greed of happiness. I had not the faintest suspicion that there was anything wrong with me. You believe that, at least, Jessie, don't you?" he demanded hotly.

"Believe it? Oh, I don't know!" she cried, with her face half hidden among the cushions. "What difference can it make my believing? You are talking about a year ago. A year ago, a century ago, it is all the same. What does it matter if here, now, to-day, I am miserable?"

The Colonel bowed himself together and rested his head in his hands. There was no hope, no comfort left. He had known that, ever since Berrington had brought him Jessie's message last night. And yet, as the girl forced the truth home upon him by her every word and gesture, his pain grew almost greater than he could endure. His wife was miserable. In a way her misery lay at his door. It was frightful to him.

At last he drew himself up, and spoke again clearly and steadily.

"Look here, Jessie! I am not squeamish: I am not trying to deceive myself in this matter. I know, to my sorrow, that you don't like sickness and sick people. I will do my best to conceal all that is unpleasant and distasteful from you. I'll keep out of your way; you shall see as little of me as possible. But understand this—you are my wife still, and you are a very beautiful woman."

Philip's breath came short and thick; he could not get on for a minute or so.

"I will have no scandal. While I live you will remain here with me. Don't be afraid. I know how to respect my word. I shall not annoy you, or ask anything from you beyond the barest

toleration and commonest courtesy; but we will have no scenes, no recriminations. There must be no occasion for gossip and common talk about our relations. You will remain under the same roof with me, and we will keep our secret, till—till——"

He ceased abruptly.

While her husband had been speaking, Jessie opened her eyes, raised herself, and turned towards him. As he uttered the last words she broke into a loud, piercing cry.

"Oh, Philip, you are changed! I do not know you! Go away—ah, go away! It is horrible. What has happened?"

The Colonel did not move.

"I've grown old," he said slowly; "that's all."

Jessie gazed at him for a few seconds in silent wonder, as though fascinated. Her lips parted, and the expression of fear grew and deepened in her eyes till it amounted to absolute agony.

"Shall you die, Philip?" she whispered at last, in an awe-stricken voice.

"Yes," answered Colonel Enderby, quietly; "I hope so."

There was a space of dead silence.

To the Colonel it was a space of dreadful and paralyzing suspense. He could say nothing more; only wait, listening in breathless expectation for his wife's next words. He noted, as so often happens in moments of supreme mental excitement, a number of little ordinary matters with curious distinctness.—Noted the comfortable crackle of the wood fire on the hearth, and the tick of the tall inlaid clock in the corner, beating its regulation sixty seconds to the minute with something of aggressive indifference to the human tragedy playing itself out so close by. And all the while Jessie leaned on her elbow, resting her rounded chin in her little pink-palmed hand, and gazed at the man who for love of her had voluntarily condemned himself to such cruel suffering, with the same pale, lovely, terrified countenance.

At last Philip could stand it no longer. He faced round.

"Speak, Jessie, speak. Say what you like, only put me out of this unspeakable torment."

The girl flung herself down face foremost upon the couch again.

"Oh, set me free!" she cried—"set me free; let me leave you to-day, while I care—while I am still sorry and love you!"

"You have never loved me," he said: "you don't even know what love means."

Jessie did not heed him.

"Don't keep me here; let me go to-day. I have made all my arrangements. If you keep me, I shall grow wicked. I can't help

it; I am made like that. I hate what is sad, and I shall come to hate you, Philip. Let me go to-day, and then I shall think of you as you were—not, not as you are now. Ah! it is the merest farce our staying here together! I can never feel to you again as I used to. It will be maddening. Think what you are condemning me to? I might as well be shut away in a prison. What does it matter if people do talk? Haven't they said bad enough things to me already? And if I am gone I shall not know it. Set me free, Philip, or I shall hate you; and I don't want to do it," she moaned—"indeed, I don't want to, but I shall not be able to help it."

For a few seconds Colonel Enderby sat quite still. His lips were parched, his throat was as dry as summer dust, his temples throbbed as though they would split; yet he was chilled to the bone, and the cold sweat stood in great drops on his forehead. By sheer force of will he mastered himself, stood up, and, coming forward a few paces, looked down at his wife, as she lay still shaken with the now ebbing tide of her passion.

"At the risk of making you hate me, I shall keep you here, Jessie," he said sternly. "I don't do this for my own sake, Heaven knows; as far as that goes, I should be thankful if we never met again. What torture do you suppose can be more scathing than that of knowing myself loathsome in the eyes that have been dearer to me than anything else on earth? You will not be the only sufferer; I shall have my share too, never fear.—I keep you for the sake of your own honour. If people have, as you hint, spoken lightly about you, they shall have no cause to do it again while I live. And, after all, you need not fret so very much about it—you'll get away soon enough. You won't have to put up with me very long, I fancy, at worst. Strong men die hard, they say; but I don't think a man can feel as I do now, and bother Death greatly by keeping him waiting."

He moved away—went across the room nearly as far as the door. And then, because true love has in it, I suppose, when all is said and done, something divine and immortal,—the Colonel stopped, hesitated, suddenly turned back; and came and knelt down beside the sofa.

As he bent low over the young girl, Philip Enderby's face was as the face of an angel—awful in its tenderness, its pardon, and in the purity of its devotion.

"Jessie," he said, "my darling, my love, my bride, put your dear arms round me once more, for the last time. I will never ask you again, trust me—never."

He kissed her eyes, her lips, her bright hair, and passed his

hand down over her lithe form, from throat to ankle, while she shuddered and shrank away under his touch with speechless emotion. Then he unclasped the soft white hands that clung so unwillingly about his neck, and laid the girl, swathed in her long white draperies, back softly and reverently upon the tawny cushions.

"Farewell," he said. "Henceforth we will meet only as strangers. Yet God keep you always, my fair child. For me it has ended badly, alas! but I do not complain. I too have had my beautiful days."

CHAPTER IV.

PHILIP ENDERBY FINDS HIS WAY HOME.

In a sense it may be said that suffering supplies its own antidote. Nature, forced beyond a legitimate point of endurance, reacts upon herself, and takes refuge in callousness or insensibility. Certain it is that when the last few searching yet illuminated moments of his interview with his wife were over, Philip Enderby fell into a condition of singular mental apathy. He was still conscious, it is true, of being bowed down by the weight of a heavy tribulation; but his perception of the extent of that tribulation became indistinct; his sense of the situation was deadened. His misery was no longer active, full of force and energy: but dull and slow, as the sob of the dying storm when the morning breaks dim and sullen over turgid sea and wreck-strewn shore, where the tempest beat out the madness of its fury through the long night.

He went back to his room, sat down near the open window; and stared, with sad, fixed eyes, out over the tennis-lawn—on which robins and starlings hopped to and fro, searching for worms in the moist grass,—to the meadow, with its great stag-headed chestnut trees, that raised their ragged branches towards the pensive blue-grey sky.

Exhausted with excitement and his night of watching, the Colonel, after a brief period of semi-consciousness, slept.

He dreamed that he stood once more in the glaring Italian sunshine, on the terrace of the Villa Mortelli. Jessie, in her simple, light cotton dress, was beside him—brilliant, merry, smiling, her arms full of great red roses. She wanted something which he was powerless to give her, and coaxed and pleaded with him in pretty, laughing, childlike fashion.—And then, somehow, the

scene changed. She had got Bertie Ames' monkey in her arms instead of the roses. She was going up a cold, wide, white marble staircase, which seemed to stretch up and up, far out of sight; and Philip followed her, always just a few steps behind. He strained every nerve to get nearer to her; called to her, implored her to wait for him: but still she flitted on lightly in front, always just out of his reach, while the monkey, looking over her shoulder, grinned and pointed at him. Philip was faint and terribly weary. He could not move fast, and she got farther and farther ahead. Sometimes she looked back, smiling gaily, seeming half inclined to stop, her soft rounded cheek lying against the monkey's wrinkled brown one in hideous proximity—and all the while the stairs stretched on for ever and ever. Philip was driven forward by a maddening necessity to overtake the girl, to clasp her to him, to hold and keep her. But he was very, very weak—it was impossible, hopeless. Suddenly there came a great sound of rushing water. Jessie flung back a high massive door that loomed up in front of her, opening on to vast spaces of drifting gloom and vapour full of hurrying shapes. The monkey's face had changed into a man's now, which Philip knew, and yet did not know.—He had seen it somewhere; but he was sick with fruitless effort and bewildered—he could not remember where. He called aloud to Jessie once more, desperately, wildly; but she neither stayed nor answered. The door swung to behind her with a clang. And she, and the thing she carried, fled away, and vanished in the driving mist.

With his arms outstretched, the sound of the closing door in his ears, and the cry on his lips,—"Lost, lost!" Philip Enderby awoke.

In this work-a-day world high romance only deigns to visit us at intervals. Between whiles we have to deal with plain, prosaic, vulgar matters, which we shall reckon an indignity or a relief, according to our humour. The first thing that met Philip's distracted gaze, when he opened his eyes, was the scarred, weather-beaten face of Berrington, as that functionary entered the room, carrying a luncheon-tray.

"Shall I bring it to you there, sir, or will you come across to the fire?" he asked quietly.

The transition of thought seemed to Philip too grossly incongruous in his present state of agitation and excitement. He put out his hand with a sharp movement of repulsion.

"Oh, put it where you like! I don't want anything," he said.

Berrington, however, was not disposed to take an offhand refusal of this kind. He drew up a table, and put the tray on it, neatly setting the glasses in order, and turning out the corners of the white napkin.

"It's past two o'clock, sir—quite time you had something," he said, with a touch of respectful authority.

The Colonel shook his head in disgust.

"I can't eat. They say a man makes a good breakfast when he's going to be hung; but it's too much to expect him to have an appetite when he's in purgatory."

Berrington bent down and poured some brandy into a tumbler with careful exactness.

"I'd give my right hand gladly to see you out of this, Colonel," he said; and his hard voice trembled.

Philip looked away over the quiet garden. He stood too sorely in need of human sympathy, just then, to be able to reject any that came to him.

"I believe you would—and I am grateful to you. You've been the best servant to me a man ever had, for years. But you will never see me out of this, except one way."

It was a little time before Berrington answered.

"You must eat, sir, all the same," he said presently. "There's no gain, I can see, in starving."

Food, which brought back a measure of physical strength, brought with it a renewed capacity of mental suffering. For so long every thought and aim of Philip Enderby's existence had centred in his wife, in her happiness, her amusements and employments: and now it was all over between them. His mind seemed a blank. The present was incomprehensible, the future inconceivable. He felt as one who has lost a limb. The brain still sends out its message; but instead of the answering movement, there is only the weary ache of severed nerve and muscle—only the horrible knowledge of mutilation. And then, too, the memory of that ghastly dream possessed him. Turn where he would, he still seemed to see the monkey's hateful changing face, or the girl's hastening figure.

An imperative desire for space, for the free air, came upon him. He picked up a hat, and, passing through the anteroom and hall, went out at the door, and along the carriage-drive towards the stables. He walked quietly, stopping now and again and resting, for exertion was difficult to him. Still, he felt easier and less distressed out-of-doors.

The stables are almost hidden from the windows of the Manor House itself by a thick belt of lilac and laurel bushes, backing the circular space of grass before the door. They consist of a range of rather fine old red-brick buildings, with high-pitched tiled roofs, freely coated with grey and orange lichens, while the front of them is covered in closely clipped ivy. The clean neat

yard was empty, the groom and stable-helper having gone to their dinner.

The Colonel had wandered on aimlessly; there seemed no reason for going one way rather than another. Then, because the day was soft and mild, and because he himself was purposeless and weary, he went and sat down on the old stone mounting-block beside the stable door. The shadows of the bare branches of the neighbouring trees flickered to and fro on the worn brick pavement at his feet. Some flies, revived by the warmth of the morning, and counting, like silly prodigals, on the immediate arrival of summer with its unlimited pleasure and plenty, had crept out of holes and crannies, and buzzed drowsily among the pungent ivy-leaves on the wall behind him. The wind was backing from south to east, and the tarnished gilt vane on the end of the stable creaked and grated as it turned unwillingly in its rusty iron socket. Perched aloft, on the topmost shoot of a young silver fir in the shrubbery, a thrush was singing; and the short broken cadences of the bird's song formed themselves into a series of quaint phrases and questions in Philip's dulled brain. He sat quite still. He could hear the horses munching their corn in the stable through the half-open casement above him, and the short, muffled stamp of their hoofs on the bedding; and all the while the thrush sang on.

It came over him that the thrushes had sung like that in the merry spring-time at Bassett Darcy years ago, when he was an ugly, lanky boy, petted in secret by his mother, and knocked about a bit by handsome, high-spirited Matt, who found in him so willing an admirer and vassal. But the birds' songs, alas! carried a very different message in those far-off days, to the young lad with all the world before him. They sang to him of fame and fair fortune, of love, of bright eyes, and of the sweet mystery of maidens' kisses; of battle and danger, and of glory; of honour and faith, and of high courage then. And of these three last and best things, perhaps, the bird sang still.—Philip Enderby was worn and broken; he could hardly tell. But for the rest, he knew it sang all sadly—of grief that knows no remedy, of pain that knows no assuaging, of disillusion and disappointment, of fond purposes broken like withered twigs by the harsh winds of law and fate; knew that it questioned, half mockingly, if silence, after all, is not kinder than speech, and darkness kinder than light, and death kinder than life. And through all the sad song memories of the old home, which he had loved and lost, to which he had turned with strong yearning and desire in the hour of his prosperity, called aloud to Philip, now in the hour of his

adversity, to come back—back, and look again on lawn and wood and river; to come back and dwell for a little space in the magic land of childhood, that is for most of us the Land of Promise too—a Land of Promise which, worse luck, unlike that of the children of Israel, lies behind us, and not before.

There was a sound of footsteps. William, in his tight-fitting, drab stable-clothes, came, whistling cheerily, back from his dinner, with a new halter in his hand. Seeing his master, he looked at him queerly for a moment: and then his hand, halter and all, went hastily up to the brim of his hat.

Colonel Enderby rose stiffly from his seat on the mounting-block; yet he had found a vague promise of alleviation in the midst of his misery.

"I'll get home," he said half aloud; "get home, and see it all once more before I die."

He called to the groom, who was unlocking the harness-room door.

"Put the saddle on the mare, William," he said; "I want her. You needn't take her round. I'll wait here till she's ready."

It was over three months since the Colonel had ridden. The unexpected order and strange alteration in his master's appearance struck William pretty forcibly. He was a spare, lean-jawed fellow, blessed with a small enough habit of observation outside the strict limits of his calling; but in this case he aspired to have an opinion of his own. He gave Colonel Enderby another look, and then observed, with awkward hesitation—

"She ain't been out of the stable to-day, sir."

"Well, she's all right, I suppose? she's sound?"

The groom shuffled his feet a little, and passed the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Oh, she's sound enough!" he answered. "But I was thinking you ain't been riding much, sir, lately, and you might find her a bit over-fresh and heady."

The words were kindly enough meant; but they carried a sharp sting of vexation to Colonel Enderby. This slight opposition made him only the more obstinately determined to have his own way.

"It's not my habit to give orders twice over," he said curtly.

"Beg your pardon, sir," murmured the groom, as he stepped inside the harness-room, and took a bridle down from its place against the matted wall. "I'm blessed if the Colonel looks any more fit to get on that 'ere rampageous 'os than a week-old baby!" he said to himself.

A wretched sense of restlessness was upon Philip Enderby still

—a feeling common alike to disease, and to what we call sorrow; but which, perhaps, is really only a subtler form of disease. He wanted to get over to Bassett directly. The big house, he knew, was empty, Jack having had a pretty sharp touch of gout—consequent on rather too high living—and having gone off to Brighton to recruit, with Augusta and the children in his train. Philip would have the place to himself, and that he was glad of. But it seemed such a long time to him waiting here. He wondered, half angrily, whether a groom had ever been so slow saddling a horse before. As to the risk he incurred in taking a long ride, his mind was unhinged by illness and mental anguish and he was past thinking or caring about it one way or another. He only wanted to escape, to get home.

A little scuffle and scrimmage as William led the great handsome hunter out of the doorway, and Philip mounted and rode away.

The mare, as had been predicted, proved very sufficiently troublesome. A long rest had cured her strained shoulder, and, like Jeshurun of old, she had "waxed fat and kicked." She was in a very larky frame of mind, delighted at getting out of the stable, and prepared to tax her rider's horsemanship pretty shrewdly.

Perhaps it was just as well so. Colonel Enderby settled himself down in the saddle. Old habit and a sense of excitement, possibly the superabundant vitality of the great headstrong beast under him, roused him into fuller life, and lightened the load of his sorrow for the time being. It was wonderfully pleasant to him —even now, when things had reached this desperate pass—to find himself across a horse again; to fight a little with the splendid animal that resisted and defied him, and, by patience and determination, to bring it gradually under control.

The mare's vagaries kept him fully occupied till he had passed out of the iron gates—through which Jessie had swept in so recklessly the previous afternoon, returning from her meeting with Bertie Ames. Nor did she subside into a decent and restrained manner of going until, after passing the church and the long straggling row of half-timbered houses, which form the end of Broomsborough village in that direction, the Colonel found himself fairly started on the Slowby high-road.

After crossing the red-brick bridge spanning the brook, a tributary of the Tull, that drains the winding valley between Claybrooke and Cold Enderby, there is a short hill. At the top of it Philip checked the mare. He turned sideways in the saddle, rested his hand on her sleek quarters, and looked back.

Beyond the silvery line of the brook, lying warm and sheltered

on the southern exposure of the rising ground, the cottages showing white among their little gardens, was the village he had just left. Beyond, again, where the rich, fertile bottom-lands trend away to the right, he could see the green rolling pastures of his own farm, over which he had dawdled so peacefully and unsuspiciously the day before.—It seemed years ago that he had stood chatting with Essex about the stock and that "rare lot 'er lambs!" The southern windows of the Manor House caught the sunlight, and glistened, pale squares of brightness, among the dark trees above the sweep of the meadows.

The Colonel gazed back long and wistfully; but he could see nothing clearly. Those distant, flickering spots of light danced before him. His eyes were full of tears.

"I did the best I could to make her happy. Ah, Jessie, Jessie, you will never know how I have loved you!"

His voice broke with a bitter sob. It was so utterly vain, so infinitely sad.

"If it was only all over!" he said to himself.

Then Bassett Darcy seemed to call aloud to him again to come home and rest. What use could there be now in looking back either actually or in spirit? He set his face like a flint; choked down the half-uttered cry of despair; turned in the saddle again; gave the mare her head; and let her go forward at a quiet, steady pace over the strip of rough grass by the road.

And so Colonel Enderby rode on up the long valley, with Melvin's Keeping, its woods and deer park, lying misty in the waning sunlight on the right. Sometimes he passed a farmer's tax-cart, with two broad-backed swaying figures in it; or met a rumbling waggon crawling slowly along the muddy road. The smoke of a passing train left a soft, wavering trail of white over the pastures and dark hedges. A couple of teams moved along the high range of plough-land on the left, the men and horses growing large and distinct against the background of dull sky as they climbed the shoulder of the hill. On past Lowcote House, with its shadowy, brown plantations and pleasant shimmering ponds, where the coots and moorhens chase each other, with clear liquid cries, in and out among the tall reeds and cat's-tails. On through Lowcote village; where the children, their day's work over, rushed clamouring out from the low sandstone school-house, with its row of large dusty windows, and clustered in groups and gangs on the footpath, playing marbles, laughing, teasing, scolding in shrill young voices. On again, up the steep rutted lane that skirts the thick fox-covert at Wood-end, and leads to the open table-land above. On between broad bare fields and ill-kept haw-

thorn hedges, across a stretch of raw, yellowish-red country, where even the straight trunks and round heads of the ubiquitous elm trees do not break the dreary sameness of the landscape;—past Stoney Cross, with its four uninteresting roads and hamlet of mean, ill-looking houses, huddling about a few roods of waste land, where stand the worn steps and broken shaft of a wayside cross.—On, one long weary mile after another, with the fixed stare in his blue eyes, and the broken-hearted craving for home and rest, rode Philip Enderby.

The mare had grown quiet by this time, and her rider was thankful for it. He was nearly spent. He began to fear his strength would give out before the end of the journey. The thud of the horse's hoofs formed itself into an ever-recurring rhythm, which beat into his brain with distressing persistence. He leaned forward, and looked longingly for the first glimpse of the twisted chimneys of the cottages in Priors Bassett street.

The aspect of the weather had changed greatly during the last hour. The sun was lost behind a layer of dull grey cloud that spread rapidly, eating up the tender blue of the sky. The wind, which had been light and variable during the morning, now blew harshly from the east; and the breath of it seemed to bleach all the land, taking the colour out of it, and making both earth and sky wan and sad.

Along Priors Bassett street Philip rode slowly. He knew every house in it, every yellow-brown sandstone gable-end, every yard of wall and painted wooden paling, every strip of garden between the low house fronts and the raised footpath skirting the road. But to-day the street seemed interminable: to-day it looked strangely vacant and forsaken. The whole interest of the place was concentrated round the forge, which glared red under its sloping slate roof, showing sharp against the darkness behind them the figures of the men working within. Some carts and farm implements in process of mending stood on the untidy patch of ground in front of it: while a company of lads loitered, in awkward, hobbledehoy fashion, about the open doors—surreptitiously appropriating scraps of old iron and other interesting refuse of the establishment when nobody happened to be looking.

Drama is conspicuous by its absence in Bassett. And Mrs. Mumford, the sour-sweet, madonna-faced wife of the worthy rector, was never tired of subsequently recounting how she and three of her dear children—precise, self-conscious little beings, by the way, their limp, fair hair curled in the smooth sausage-like manner that obtained so universally some twenty years ago, and that lingers yet in a few respectably unprogressive families—how she and the

children had met Colonel Enderby that afternoon, just as they were coming out of the rectory gate. The good lady, who, with a deep-seated belief in the security of her own social position, combined a lively desire for recognition of the said position on the part of others, was sadly put about by the fact that Colonel Enderby failed, in passing, to look at her, or return her salute. Later, things explained themselves; and Mrs. Mumford had her hour of enviable notoriety.

And, in truth, the Colonel had no strength left just now for small social amenities. He rode on doggedly and resolutely; his face pale and rigid as though it had been carved in stone, his eyes fastened on the road just in front of his horse's head. The last few miles had been as much as he could manage. The excitement that nerved him at starting had evaporated; the emotion that had quickened him when looking back at the Manor House had passed away, leaving his mind more than ever confused and dim. Pain and utter weariness of body increased upon him, and it was just as much as he could do to guide the mare and keep himself upright in the saddle. With a dull, but half-conscious sense of relief, he heard the park gate swing-to behind him.

But Bassett Darcy, on this particular afternoon, wore anything but a cheerful aspect with which to greet her returning son. The wide rolling slopes of the park showed a dirty, neutral tint, dotted here and there with the darker tones of the gnarled twisted thorn thickets. The clumps of larger trees rose gaunt and spectral through the livid easterly blight. Down on the low land, shrouding the massive house and its adjacent buildings, and spreading like a grey winding-sheet along the course of the river, hung the fog; stagnating in the shelter, and drifting sullenly to westward, where the wind caught and drove it. The mare plunged and snorted as the rough Scotch cattle, getting up from the roadside, started away a few paces; and then, turning, stared fiercely, tossing their wild shaggy heads and wide horns in the air. The serious midland scene had, for the moment, something weird and unreal about it. And, like Sintram of old, calm of face, pure in heart, but hard beset with strange sights, strange torments, strange temptations, Philip Enderby rode down into that dreary valley of shadow.

The big house, with all its blinds drawn down, stood deserted. Silence reigned, not only indoors, but out-of-doors as well—save for the rattle of the mare's hoofs on the cobbles, as the Colonel turned her in under the stable archway. In the courtyard not a soul was to be seen.

The Colonel got off his horse with difficulty, and stood for some minutes, with his hand resting on the creature's shoulder. He was cold and cramped, and the ground seemed to reel under his feet. Stiffly and painfully, half-stupefied with weakness, he got one of the stable doors open, and, backing the mare into an empty stall, fastened the pillar rein on either side to the rings of her bit. Then, passing through the archway again, he went away up the carriage-drive, under the double flight of stone steps, and round to the garden front of the house.

The fog streamed by, thick, chill, and clinging before the easterly wind. It veiled everything beyond an area of some few yards in grey semi-obscurity. Colonel Enderby went on, very slowly, along the terrace—the house, with its many closed windows, rising grim and dark on his left hand. He wandered on, stopping every few steps to get his breath—wandered on, hardly comprehending why or where he went, urged forward by that same terrible instinct of restlessness. Turning off the terrace, he struck down across the lawns in the direction of the little wood which clothes the promontory of land in the curve of the river. The smooth grass was slippery with fog; the air grew more dense and clammy. It took him a long time to get down over the lawn to the outskirts of the wood. He moved uncertainly, stumbling now and then, and recovering his footing with difficulty.

There was a path through the wood somewhere, he knew, if he could only find it, leading to an old wooden boat-house and summer-house fronting on the river. Philip had not thought of the place for years: yet suddenly he was possessed with an overmastering desire to see it again.—It used to be a pleasant spot on still summer evenings. His mother liked it. She would sit there and watch Matt and him, as they punted about on the sluggish stream, angling diligently for fish which as diligently refused to be caught. If he could only find the path, he would go back there now and rest.—He was in pain: pain which grew stronger and sharper every minute: and he was so unutterably, so cruelly tired.

The fog lifted a little.

Philip pushed forward over the sodden leaves, while fallen twigs snapped under his tread. He groped about, trying earnestly to find the path; but he could not see his way. He was half-blind with pain and exhaustion.—And it was all changed, too; the underwood had grown up thick and tangled since he was here last.

He struggled on: stumbled, almost fell; got on to his feet again, struggled on a little further. He tried to raise his arm to shield his face from the low sweeping branches and briars; but

he could not raise it; it was numb and nerveless.—Again he stumbled, and fell forward. He had a moment of unreasoning, passionate anger, like that of a disappointed child.—He had missed the way altogether, and got back to the outskirts of the wood again. It was unspeakably hateful to be like this—helpless, feeble, bewildered. The man's pride rebelled under it.

He leaned up against the smooth silvery trunk of a great beech on the edge of the wood. He was racked with pain; utterly desolate and despairing. Had Bassett called him home only to mock at and shame him? to make him know his own physical infirmity and disgrace? to show him how low he had fallen?

Then, in the midst of his intolerable humiliation, a great light broke upon Philip Enderby's soul. Suddenly he understood what was about to happen. He had a perception of a mighty and final deliverance.

He braced his shoulder against the stem of the beech tree. His bodily suffering was keen and bitter: but his mind was clearer than it had been since he parted with his wife in the drawing-room of the Manor House in the morning, and with that clearness of mind came a sense of peace.

"This is death," he said to himself—"gracious, kindly death. It is coming at last. God is good, after all. He sends the recall when He sees we can't stand it any longer."

He stood and waited—awed but calm and very thankful, for the thing that should come to him.

In the last few minutes the wind had risen, scattering the fog, which rolled away in heavy, opaque masses down the valley. Philip raised his head, and looked once more, with all the wonder of dying eyes, at the place which he loved;—heard the rush of the wind and the call of the rooks in the high trees overhead; heard the rabbit scurry away through the undergrowth; heard the splash of the rising fish, and the gurgle and sweep of the river; —saw between the tree-stems the great square house standing stately above its broad, fair lawns and shrubberies; saw the western sky open in dull crimson between heavy bars of low-lying cloud, and the sun sink, a ball of sullen flame, behind the rounded masses of the distant woods.

"Farewell, dear old earth!" he said. "You and I, too, have been lovers."

The fierce agony of pain came on him again—a dreadful tearing apart of soul and body, in which the man's faith and reason almost fainted. He staggered forward blindly for a few yards.

"Jessie, you are free," he gasped. "Ah! God be merciful—be merciful to me a sinner!"

Then he fell back his whole length on the ground, among the rotting leaves and the coarse grass and the sedges.

Nature strikes one as but a heartless and heedless mistress at times. She has no tears to shed even for those who have worshipped her most devoutly, when they pass out into the eternal silence. In the vast circle of her perfect order and endless fertility Death is no blot, no inscrutable mystery. It has its place duly set and apportioned; and appears, not an accident at once revolting and incomprehensible, but rather as an act of restoration. It gives back to her—worn, soiled, and tattered—the fleshly garment she lent the human spirit at its birth, to make, in due process of time, over again into new forms of freshness, wonder, and beauty.

That night at Bassett Darcy the wind swept the heavens clear of cloud, and the keen stars came out one by one in the great vault overhead, and the river slipped by, with its sweet liquid whisper, under the dark trees, between its low rush-grown banks. The rabbits played together in the dusk on the flat grass meadow; and the owls came from their covert, and sailed, on broad, silent wings, round the woods and the house, hailing each other, in love or challenge, with ghostly hollow-voiced greetings. In the small hours of the morning the frost crept up from the stream-side, and whitened all the lawns with a glittering film of innumerable crystals. And all the while Philip Enderby, who had loved and suffered, and wrestled with temptation, and strained manfully after a noble ideal of living, lay there alone, stark and cold, his sightless blue eyes half open, and the surprise of everlasting rest on his dead lips.

What shall we say? Is it a thought of strong consolation or of terror, that the fate of each one of us matters so little; and that the great world rolls on, from age to age, serene and fearless, as careless of the birth and death of her human children as she is of the gnat that flickers through one bright hour above the swaying reed-bed, or of the hoar frost that vanishes into nothingness under the first kiss of the sun at morning? Ah! love us, in pity love us, brother mortals: for Nature, in her greatness, is deaf and blind to all our sorrow and complaining, and when we go hence nothing stays to mourn for us either in earth or sky. Stay you, then, and mourn at least for a season.—It is vain to hope the most faithful among you will mourn us for long.

CHAPTER V.

"BENEDICK THE MARRIED MAN."

MORE than three years have passed away. It is June—June in the south too, as you may see by the depth of shade cast by the projecting angle of the tall yellow house behind you. A garden, brilliant with flowers, cut at many different levels out on the steep hillside, with small paths, numerous flights of steps, half overgrown with creepers—a garden, the geography of which it is difficult to master at first sight, but whose charm grows upon you with acquaintance—stretches down to a wall backing a line of low, grass-grown earthworks. Beyond is a road, with a wide parapet on the further side of it; and then the dancing, sparkling, purple sea. To the right, between tall, solitary, painted houses, and looking across the patches of vineyard and garden, you can see the city, with its great half-circle of splendid quays and buildings facing the crowded harbour. Above are the mountains. And to the west is the long sweep of the serrated coast-line—sharp and clear in the sunlight, and blotted in the shadow with deep blue haze.

On the flat strip of ground between the garden wall and the earthworks, a quantity of shot is piled in black dazzling pyramids and squares: and a little farther on stands a small, grim, windowless building, before which a sentry, in white linen gaiters, pale blue uniform, and white covered *képi*, slowly paces to and fro. You have seen the spot before, reader; but with other eyes and under other circumstances, so it is worth while to run through the list of its attractions once again.

In the deep shadow, cast by the angle of the house—with glass doors opening into a cool, vaulted, painted hall on his right, and a row of red and white oleander bushes in full flower on his left—extended in a long cane chair, and clad in the lightest of summer suits, Mr. Ames, a cigarette between his lips, idly contemplated the brilliant scene around him. Bertie Ames has changed somewhat in these last three years. He has filled out a good deal, his figure has lost a little of its original slimness, and the expression of his dark, handsome, sleepy face has grown more decided. Heaven forbid that I should suggest that he has grown stout or truculent! To the end Mr. Ames will be a graceful-looking person, and will retain a delicate flavour of indifference and polite cynicism in manner.

His chair stood across the corner of a large, many-coloured carpet, spread on the gravel before the window; on which, half sitting, half lying, with a multitude of toys and infantine treasures scattered about her, Eleanor Ames played with her year-old baby —a dimpled, sturdy, brown-limbed darling, his great eyes filled with the happy content of a creature to whom the world as yet has shown only a smiling face.

A famous writer tells us that marriage is a taming process. To some women motherhood is a more taming process still. In the tender forethought, ceaseless watchfulness, and anxiety of motherhood, Eleanor Ames had not only grown more gentle and unexacting; but had found the truest and purest satisfactions of her life. She had not the temperament which goes to make a happy woman. Few persons whose sensibilities are keen can have that. But in this cooing, clinging morsel of humanity—whose tiny fat hands, with funny uncertain gestures, dabbed down the towers she so diligently erected for him, flinging the wooden bricks over her gown and the carpet with gurglings of the liveliest delight—she came nearer laying hold of that much-vaunted yet practically almost unknown quantity, of happiness, than ever before.

Bertie stretched himself in his long chair, and yawned a little.

"It was infernally hot on 'Change to-day," he said, in his soft, drawling voice. "One felt like those excellent Jewish youths in the fiery furnace, with this difference—that whereas they were cast into it because they refused to worship the golden image, we cast ourselves into it voluntarily, in a spirit of emulation, to try who could worship her most successfully. Really it is inspiring to note the vastness of one's own capacity of deterioration. I cared the very least possible about making money when I first went into business: and now I dream, not of you, Nell—don't indulge in any charming delusions upon that head—as I sit here watching your gambols with that delectable infant Bacchus, but simply and solely of dollars and cents. *Facilis descensus Averni.* That remark was made a long time ago; but it holds good still, you know."

His wife looked up from the tower she was just completing—the baby sitting by with round, serious eyes, one thumb stuck into his rosebud of a mouth, while with the other hand he caressed his bare toes, as they protruded from under the short skirts of his full white frock.

"You enjoy making the worst of yourself, Bertie," she answered; "and that is only a more subtle kind of self-conceit, after all."

"True," he rejoined, with admirable mildness. "But one must cultivate a certain measure of conceit to keep one's self going at all; and a subtle form of it is less offensive than a gross one, any way, isn't it?"

Eleanor turned her attention to the baby.

"Now, sweetest, it is ready. Look! so very high. That's right, both hands, and down it all goes,"—as the tower fell with a mimic crash to the ground.

"You will bring that boy up to be an iconoclastic socialist and red republican, if you pander to his destructive and disorderly inclinations in this open way," remarked Mr. Ames.

He chucked the end of his cigarette away under the red-stemmed, long-leaved oleander bushes; and rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, pressing the tops of his fingers together as he leant back again indolently and looked at his handsome wife between half-closed eyelids.

"The deterioration of my character," he continued, "was brought home very forcibly to me to-day by an encounter I had with an old acquaintance, coming stewing up the Orefici—to return to the interesting subject of myself. I feel communicative, Nell; but it is quite unnecessary you should listen unless you are so disposed.—I was reminded of the past, of certain passages in my experiences which were not without a touch of pathos. Just under Piola's Madonna, I ran right into the arms of that worthy little gentleman, Edmund Drake. He was quite affectionate to me, having a heavy cargo of conversation on board apparently, and no English ear wherein to discharge it. I asked him to dinner."

"Ah! I hoped we should have been alone for once to-night," said Mrs. Ames, quickly. "Somebody is always coming. I am disappointed.—My precious one, you must not suck that nasty little red horse; all the paint will come off. Come, come! give it to mother, like a good child."

"It was a Christian act, Nell, I assure you. He was absolutely explosive with the desire to find some one to whom to speak. He told me several edifying little scraps of gossip. To begin with, our dear aunt, Mrs. Murray, has had a seizure; and Cecilia is nursing her day and night like an angel. There is a rumour that a Tullingworth doctor, who is supposed once to have entertained tender sentiments towards her—Cecilia, I mean; not her mother—has settled a large sum of money on that little scamp Johnnie. The doctor must be more or less of a fool. The money, of course, will go as poor Eugene's went, in ways that had best not be too closely inquired into."

Bertie Ames paused for a minute or two, and yawned again just a trifle elaborately.

"Mr. Drake inquired about Jessie," he said presently.

Eleanor bent her head low over the baby, and gently tried to remove the tempting mouthful of little red horse from between his pouting lips.

"Had he not heard, then?"

"Apparently not, so I enlightened him. I told him how Mr. Lewis J. Vandercrup's neatness of personal appearance, supported by a chocolate-brown fronted house on Fifth Avenue, a cottage at Newport, an apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann, a villa at Nice, fast-trotting horses, a steam-yacht, and modest, unostentatious, little offerings in the way of packing-cases full of diamonds, had entirely won Jessie Enderby's affections. Drake swore a little, and then asked if the marriage was a happy one. I told him we had reason to believe that the lady was perfectly satisfied, and that the gentleman had attained his highest ambition in possessing the most expensive wife in New York, which, I imagine, is saying a good deal. Upon that, I grieve to say, Mr. Drake became extremely blasphemous. It was specially awkward, for two virginal, high-nosed Englishwomen, in green gauze veils, were looking in furtively at the shop windows just behind us. Why, I wonder," added Mr. Ames, with an air of gentle inquiry, "do Englishwomen always look in at shop windows furtively, as though they were in the act of committing a petty larceny, and were afraid of being taken red-handed?—However, I bore with him. He appeared so extremely apoplectic that I fancied it would be wiser to let him have it out. When he had blown off his steam, he asked after you. He was good enough to bracket me with poor Colonel Enderby; to tell me I had always known which side my bread was buttered; to intimate that I was an acute person, and, matrimonially, had got very much the best of the bargain."

"What did you answer, Bertie?" asked Eleanor, looking up at him suddenly, with a flush on her cheek.

"Ah! my dear," he cried, half laughing, "you don't need to have that recounted at this time of day, do you? Surely, now, it is quite a matter of ancient history."

The flush deepened in Mrs. Ames' cheek. She drew the baby towards her, and pressed her face against his fat brown shoulder.

"There are some chapters of ancient history a woman can hardly read too often," she said, perhaps a trifle proudly.

"Your husband must be a brute if he does not love you, Nell," rejoined Bertie.

He stretched out his hand over the arm of his chair towards her as he spoke. The baby clutched at it with soft dimpled fingers, raised himself bravely into a standing position, stuck first one foot and then the other straight out in front of him—having still a greater inclination to regard those members as agreeable playfellows than as serious aids to the process of locomotion: and finally, losing his balance, descended with a flop in a sitting posture upon the carpet again. The said flop jarred his small person, and he gazed round with a piteous and tearful demand for sympathy.

"It serves you right, you officious little animal," his father said. "It wasn't your hand I wanted, you know, but your mother's."

Eleanor rose to her feet, picked up the child, and stood, a stately well-poised figure, her head raised, and the black lace she wore falling in dusky folds over her shoulders, looking out far across the glittering bay.

"Ah! poor Philip Enderby," she cried suddenly. "I am frightened when I think of him as I stand here with my boy in my arms, in the midst of all this ease and beauty and comfort. God forgive me, if I did him a cruel injury!"

Bertie smiled quietly; and shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked at her, so as to get a better view. Undeniably his wife appeared to great advantage just now.

"You have still rather an excessive way of stating things, Nell," he said, in his rich, sweet tones. "There is quite another point of view from which the question may be regarded, and to which I venture to call your attention. If he had married Cecilia years ago, if he had never fallen in love with that fascinating being, Jessie—mark you, I don't join in Mr. Drake's anathemas by any means—Colonel Enderby would have remained a very ordinary, prejudiced, stiff-necked English soldier and gentleman, and the world would never have dreamed of what he was capable. You gave him his opportunity. He had the wit to take it. He became something of a hero. Of course, heroism demands certain sacrifices. Well, I must say Colonel Enderby made them in a very praiseworthy manner. He never liked me, but I bear him no malice, you see; I do him justice."

She turned to him rather sternly.

"Don't jest about this, Bertie," she said. "Let us keep a few memories sacred. Let there be a few things we don't push aside with an easy shrug of the shoulders and a cynical laugh."

Bertie Ames sat up, and a strange expression crossed his face. His eyes were sad enough still at moments. They were very sad now, as he looked full and steadily at his wife.

"My dear Nell, you are guilty of doing me a slight injustice," he answered. "Perhaps I have paid a more practical tribute to Colonel Enderby's memory than any one else, after all. I don't want to exalt my own small virtues; but remember, I found myself left alone, under highly critical circumstances, with his widow, who, being at daggers drawn with all her friends and neighbours, was thrown with rather dangerous completeness upon my hands."

He rose to his feet, came over, and, standing by his wife, rested his hand lightly on her shoulder, and then kissed the baby, as it lay smiling in her arms.

"I am not a very sentimental person," he went on gently, "but I don't put quite everything aside, Nell, with a laugh and shrug of the shoulders—even so. I often think of the frosty February morning, with the pale, primrose-coloured sunrise, after that wretched night of fruitless search, when Drake and I found Philip Enderby lying under the bare trees beside that quiet English river.—It was a thing one does not easily forget. I should be very glad to know that my face would have no worse secrets to tell than that man's had when I, too, lie dead.—There, there! what's the matter with you? Why, my dear, you are charmingly soft-hearted!—But here's Parker, looking for all the world as if she thought I'd been beating you, coming to fetch the baby. It's time for you to go in and dress. Put on a nice gown, and finish the conquest of good little Drake. I like to hear men say my wife is the handsomest woman, of her age, in Genoa, you know."

When he was alone, Bertie Ames lay back comfortably in his long chair again. The deep shadow of the house got narrow and narrower as the sun moved towards the west; there were sweet scents in the air from the blooming garden, and a low murmur of the sea and of the distant turmoil and life of the great urgent city.

Bertie had been a good deal stirred somehow, and he did not altogether enjoy it. In matters of feeling he was still decidedly indolent. Emotion is a dangerous, unstable thing, the mother of innumerable follies. He did his best, therefore, to eschew her company.

Meanwhile, round the end of the house, stopping nervously every minute or two, with rapid angry glances and quick liftings of the eyebrows, came a very woebegone, little figure. The monkey scuffled along near the ground, holding up the links of a broken chain, that dangled from a broad leathern band round his waist, in one thin, skinny hand. He crept under the shelter of the oleanders, and waited there, peering anxiously about him, chattering to himself, and showing his broken, discoloured teeth,

half in wickedness and half in fear—reaching up now and then as he squatted on his haunches, and scratching his ugly old head, with the hand that was disengaged, in deep perplexity.

Bertie Ames rolled himself another cigarette, struck a match and lighted it. As he did so, Malvolio crawled out from his hiding-place, and came and cowered silently against his master's knee.

"Ah, you abominable little sinner!" said the latter, looking down at the creature. "You've broken your chain, and got loose again, then, have you?"

Malvolio sidled closer to him, gazing up with an air of pathetic misery into his face. With all his affectation of cynicism and dislike of emotion, Mr. Ames was at bottom very tender-hearted. He picked up the monkey, held it in his arms, and began fondling it.

"You are very faithful, you poor little devil," he said gently. "It seems hardly fair to have you banished and beaten because you had just humanity enough in you to get an acute attack of jealousy, and try to bite and belabour that reigning favourite of the establishment, the baby.—But you can't expect to indulge your small eccentricities with impunity any more than the rest of us. In a way, it is a compliment to the primeval ape, our common ancestress, and proves her claims, that both branches of her descendants, notwithstanding slight outward differences, should be judged by the same law."

Bertie Ames mused for a few seconds in silence, softly patting the dismal-looking little beast that nestled against him.

"No," he went on presently; "you cannot expect to get off scot-free any more than others, Malvolio. There is a price set on everything in this world. Not only on vice, and ugliness, and crime, and weakness, and folly: but on love, and youth, and beauty, and virtue, and faith, and honour as well. And we all pay it rigorously."

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed a little.

"Pay it? Good heavens! I should just think we did. We pay it down to the uttermost farthing."

THE END.

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